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# DIDEROT

AND

# THE ENCYCLOPÆDISTS.

BY

JOHN MORLEY.

VOL. I.

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# PREFACE.

THE present work, of which about one half has already appeared from time to time in the pages of the *Fortnightly Review*, closes a series of studies on the literary preparation for the French Revolution. It differs from the co[illegible]ion volumes on Voltaire and Rousseau, in being much more fully descriptive. In the case of those two famous writers, every educated reader knows more or less of their performances. Of Diderot and his circle, such knowledge cannot be taken for granted, and I have therefore thought it best to occupy a considerable space, which I hope that those who do me the honour to read these pages will not find excessive, with what is little more than transcript or analysis. Such a method will at least enable the reader to see what those ideas really were, which the social and economic condition of France on the eve of the convulsion made so

welcome to men. The shortcomings of the encyclopædic group are obvious enough. They have lately been emphasized in the ingenious and one-sided exaggerations of that brilliant man of letters, Mr. Taine. The social significance and the positive quality of much of their writing is more easily missed, and this side of their work it has been one of my principal objects, alike in the case of Voltaire, of Rousseau, and of Diderot, to bring into the prominence that it deserves in the history of opinion.

The edition of Diderot's Works to which the references are made, is that in twenty volumes by the late Mr. Assézat and Mr. Maurice Tourneux. The only other serious book on Diderot with which I am acquainted is Rosenkranz's valuable *Diderot's Leben*, published in 1866, and abounding in full and patient knowledge. Of the numerous criticisms on Diderot by Raumer, Arndt, Hettner, Damiron, Bersot, and above all by Mr. Carlyle, I need not make more particular mention.

*May*, 1878.

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*ERRATUM.*

On p. 33 the date of Mdlle. Voland's death is given as 1774. It ought probably to be 1784 or 1783.

# DIDEROT.

## CHAPTER I.

### PRELIMINARY.

THERE was a moment in the last century when the Gallican church hoped for a return of internal union and prosperity. This brief era of hope coincided almost exactly with the middle of the century. Voltaire was in exile at Berlin. The author of the Persian Letters and the Spirit of Laws was old and near his end. Rousseau was copying music in a garret. The Encyclopædia was looked for, but only as a literary project of some associated booksellers. The Jansenists, who had been so many in number and so firm in spirit five-and-twenty years earlier, had now sunk to a small minority of the French clergy. The great ecclesiastical body at length offered an unbroken front to its rivals, the great judicial bodies. A patriotic minister was indeed audacious enough to propose a tax upon ecclesiastical property, but the Church fought the battle and won. Troops had just been despatched to hunt and scatter the Protestants of the desert, and bigots exulted

in the thought of pastors swinging on gibbets, and heretical congregations fleeing for their lives before the fire of orthodox musketry. The house of Austria had been forced to suffer spoliation at the hands of the infidel Frederick, but all the world was well aware that the haughty and devout Empress-Queen would seize a speedy opportunity of taking a crushing vengeance; France would this time be on the side of righteousness and truth. For the moment a churchman might be pardoned if he thought that superstition, ignorance, abusive privilege, and cruelty were on the eve of the smoothest and most triumphant days that they had known since the Reformation.

We now know how illusory this sanguine anticipation was destined to prove, and how promptly. In little more than forty years after the triumphant enforcement of the odious system of confessional certificates, then the crowning event of ecclesiastical supremacy, Paris saw the Feast of the Supreme Being and the adoration of the Goddess of Reason. The Church had scarcely begun to dream, before she was rudely and peremptorily awakened. She found herself confronted by the most energetic, hardy, and successful assailants whom the spirit of progress ever inspired. Compared with the new attack, Jansenism was no more than a trifling episode in a family quarrel. Thomists and Molinists became as good as confederates, and Quietism barely seemed a heresy. In every age, even in the very depth of the times of faith, there had arisen disturbers of the intellectual peace. Almost

each century after the resettlement of Europe by Charlemagne had produced some individual, or some little group, who had ventured to question this or that article of the ecclesiastical creed, to whom broken glimpses of new truth had come, and who had borne witness against the error or inconsistency or inadequateness of old ways of thinking. The questions which presented themselves to the acuter minds of a hundred years ago were present to the acuter minds who lived hundreds of years before that. The more deeply we penetrate into the history of opinion, the more strongly are we tempted to believe that in the greater matters of speculation no question is altogether new, and hardly any answer is altogether new. But the Church had known how to deal with intellectual insurgents, from Abelard in the twelfth century down to Giordano Bruno and Vanini in the seventeenth. They were isolated; they were for the most part submissive; and if they were not, the arm of the Church was very long and her grasp mortal. And all these meritorious precursors were made weak by one cardinal defect, for which no gifts of intellectual acuteness could compensate. They had the scientific idea, but they lacked the social idea. They could have set opinion right about the efficacy of the syllogism, and the virtue of entities and quiddities. They could have taught Europe earlier than the Church allowed it to learn, that the sun does not go round the earth, and that it is the earth which goes round the sun. But they were wholly unfitted to deal with the prodigious difficulties

of moral and social direction. This function, so immeasurably more important than the mere discovery of any number of physical relations, it was the glory of the Church to have discharged for some centuries with as much success as the conditions permitted. We are told indeed by writers ignorant alike of human history and human nature, that only physical science can improve the social condition of man. The common sense of the world always rejects this gross fallacy. The acquiescence for so many centuries in the power of the great directing organization of western Europe, notwithstanding its intellectual inadequateness, was the decisive expression of that rejection.

After the middle of the last century the insurrection against the pretensions of the Church and against the doctrines of Christianity was marked in one of its most important phases by a new and most significant feature. In this phase it was animated at once by the scientific idea and by the social idea. It was an advance both in knowledge and in moral motive. It rested on a conception which was crude and imperfect enough, but which was still almost, like the great ecclesiastical conception itself, a conception of life as a whole. Morality, positive law, social order, economics, the nature and limits of human knowledge, the constitution of the physical universe, had one by one disengaged themselves from theological explanations. The final philosophical movement of the century in France, which was represented by Diderot, now tended to a new social synthesis resting on a purely positive basis. If

this movement had only added to its other contents the historic idea, its destination would have been effectually reached. As it was, its leaders surveyed the entire field with as much accuracy and with as wide a range as their instruments allowed, and they scattered over the world a set of ideas which at once entered into energetic rivalry with the ancient scheme of authority. The great symbol of this new comprehensiveness in the insurrection was the Encyclopædia.

The Encyclopædia was virtually a protest against the old organization, no less than against the old doctrine. Broadly stated, the great central moral of it all was this: that human nature is good, that the world is capable of being made a desirable abiding-place, and that the evil of the world is the fruit of bad education and bad institutions. This cheerful doctrine now strikes on the ear as a commonplace and a truism. A hundred years ago in France it was a wonderful gospel, and the beginning of a new dispensation. It was the great counter-principle to asceticism in life and morals, to formalism in art, to absolutism in the social ordering, to obscurantism in thought. Every social improvement since has been the outcome of that doctrine in one form or another. The conviction that the character and lot of man are indefinitely modifiable for good, was the indispensable antecedent to any general and energetic endeavour to modify the conditions that surround him. The omnipotence of early instruction, of laws, of the method of social order, over the infinitely plastic impulses of the human

creature—this was the maxim which brought men of such widely different temperament and leanings to the common enterprise. Everybody can see what wide and deep-reaching bearings such a doctrine possessed; how it raised all the questions connected with psychology and the formation of character; how it went down to the very foundation of morals; into what fresh and unwelcome sunlight it brought the articles of the old theology; with what new importance it clothed all the relations of real knowledge and the practical arts; what intense interest it lent to every detail of economics and legislation and government.

The deadly chagrin with which churchmen saw the encyclopædic fabric rising was very natural. The teaching of the Church paints man as fallen and depraved. The new secular knowledge clashed at a thousand points, alike in letter and in spirit, with the old sacred lore. Even where it did not clash, its vitality of interest and attraction drove the older lore into neglected shade. To stir men's vivid curiosity and hope about the earth was to make their care much less absorbing about the kingdom of heaven. To awaken in them the spirit of social improvement was ruin to the most scandalous and crying social abuse then existing. The old spiritual power had lost its instinct, once so keen and effective, of wise direction. Instead of being the guide and corrector of the organs of the temporal power, it was the worst of their accomplices. The Encyclopædia was an informal, transitory, and provisional organization of the new spiritual power.

The school of which it was the great expounder, achieved a supreme control over opinion by the only title to which control belongs: a more penetrating eye for social exigencies and for the means of satisfying them.

Our veteran humorist told us long ago in his whimsical way that the importance of the Acts of the French Philosophes recorded in whole acres of typography is fast exhausting itself, that the famed Encyclopædical Tree has borne no fruit, and that Diderot the great has contracted into Diderot the easily measurable. The humoristic method is a potent instrument for working such contractions and expansions at will. The greatest of men are measurable enough, if you choose to set up a standard that is half transcendental and half cynical. A saner and more patient criticism measures the conspicuous figures of the past differently. It seeks their relations to the great forward movements of the world, and asks to what quarter of the heavens their faces were set, whether towards the east where the new light dawns, or towards the west after the old light has sunk irrevocably down. Above all, a saner criticism bids us remember that pioneers in the progressive way are rare, their lives rude and sorely tried, and their services to mankind beyond price. 'Diderot is Diderot,' wrote one greater than Carlyle: 'a peculiar individuality; whoever holds him or his doings cheaply is a Philistine, and the name of them is legion. Men know neither from God, nor from Nature, nor from their fellows, how to receive with gratitude what is

valuable beyond appraisement' (*Goethe*). An intense philistinism underlay the great spiritual reaction that followed the Revolution, and not even such of its apostles as Wordsworth and Carlyle wholly escaped the taint.

Forty years ago, when Carlyle wrote, it might really seem to a prejudiced observer as if the encyclopædic tree had borne no fruit. Even then, and even when the critic happened to be a devotee of the sterile transcendentalism then in vogue, one might have expected some recognition of the fact that the seed of all the great improvements bestowed on France by the Revolution, in spite of the woeful evils which followed in its train, had been sown by the Encyclopædists. But now that the last vapours of the transcendental reaction are clearing away, we see that the movement initiated by the Encyclopædia is again in full progress. Materialistic solutions in the science of man, humanitarian ends in legislation, naturalism in art, active faith in the improvableness of institutions,—all these are once more the marks of speculation and the guiding ideas of practical energy. The philosophical parenthesis is at an end. The interruption of eighty years counts for no more than the twinkling of an eye in the history of the transformation of the basis of thought. And the interruption has for the present come to a close. Europe again sees the old enemies face to face; the Church, and a Social Philosophy slowly labouring to build her foundations in positive science. It cannot be other than interesting to examine the aims, the instru-

ments, and the degree of success of those who a century ago saw most comprehensively how profound and far-reaching a metamorphosis awaited the thought of the western world. We shall do this most properly in connection with Diderot.

Whether we accept or question Comte's strong description of Diderot as the greatest genius of the eighteenth century, it is at least undeniable that he was the one member of the great party of illumination with a real title to the name of thinker. Voltaire and Rousseau were the heads of two important schools, and each of them set deep and unmistakable marks both on the opinion and the events of the century. It would not be difficult to show that their influence was wider than that of the philosopher who discerned the inadequateness of both. But Rousseau was moved by passion and sentiment; Voltaire was only the master of a brilliant and penetrating rationalism. Diderot alone of this famous trio had in his mind the idea of scientific method; alone showed any feeling for a doctrine, and for large organic and constructive conceptions. He had the rare faculty of true philosophic meditation. Though immeasurably inferior both to Voltaire and Rousseau in gifts of literary expression, he was as far their superior in breadth and reality of artistic principle. He was the originator of a natural, realistic, and sympathetic school of literary criticism. He aspired to impose new forms upon the drama. Both in imaginative creation and in criticism, his work was a constant appeal from the artificial conventions of the

classic schools, to the actualities of common life. The same spirit united with the tendency of his philosophy to place him among the very few men who have been great and genuine observers of human nature and human existence. So singular and widely active a genius may well interest us, even apart from the important place he holds in the history of literature and opinion.

## CHAPTER II.

### YOUTH.

DENIS DIDEROT was born at Langres in 1713, being thus a few months younger than Rousseau (1712), and nearly twenty years younger than Voltaire (1694); two years younger than Hume (1711), and eleven years older than Kant (1724). His stock was ancient and of good repute. The family had been engaged in the great local industry, the manufacture of cutlery, for no less than two centuries in direct line. Diderot liked to dwell on the historic prowess of his town, from the days of Julius Cæsar and the old Lingones and Sabinus, down to the time of the Great Monarch. With the taste of his generation for tracing moral qualities to a climatic source, he explained a certain vivacity and mobility in the people of his district by the great frequency and violence of its atmospheric changes from hot to cold, from calm to storm, from rain to sunshine. 'Thus they learn from earliest infancy to turn to every wind. The man of Langres has a head on his shoulders like the weathercock at the top of the church spire. It is never fixed at one point; if it returns to the point it has left, it is not to stop there.

With an amazing rapidity in their movements, their desires, their plans, their fancies, their ideas, they are cumbrous in speech. For myself, I belong to my country side.' This was thoroughly true. He inherited all the versatility of his compatriots, all their swift impetuosity, and something of their want of dexterity in expression.

His father was one of the bravest, most upright, most patient, most sensible of men. Diderot never ceased to regret that the old man's portrait had not been taken with his apron on, his spectacles pushed up, and a hand on the grinder's wheel. After his death, none of his neighbours could speak of him to his son without tears in their eyes. Diderot, wild and irregular as were his earlier days, had always a true affection for his father. 'One of the sweetest moments of my life,' he once said, 'was more than thirty years ago, and I remember it as if it were yesterday, when my father saw me coming home from school, my arms laden with the prizes I had carried off, and my shoulders burdened with the wreaths they had given me, which were too big for my brow and had slipped over my head. As soon as he caught sight of me some way off, he threw down his work, hurried to the door to meet me, and fell a weeping. It is a fine sight—a grave and sterling man melted to tears.'[1] Of his mother we know less. He had a sister, who seems to have possessed the rough material of his own qualities. He describes her as 'lively, active, cheerful, decided, prompt to take offence, slow to come

[1] *Œuv.*, xviii. 365.

round again, without much care for present or future, never willing to be imposed on by people or circumstance; free in her ways, still more free in her talk; she is a sort of Diogenes in petticoats. . . . She is the most original and the most strongly marked creature I know; she is goodness itself, but with a peculiar physiognomy.'[1] His only brother showed some of the same native stuff, but of thinner and sourer quality. He became an abbé and a saint, peevish, umbrageous, and as excessively devout as his more famous brother was excessively the opposite. 'He would have been a good friend and a good brother,' wrote Diderot, 'if religion had not bidden him trample under foot such poor weaknesses as these. He is a good Christian, who proves to me every minute of the day how much better it would be to be a good man. He shows that what they call evangelical perfection is only the mischievous art of stifling nature, which would most likely have spoken as lustily in him as in me.'[2]

Diderot, like so many others of the eighteenth-century reformers, was a pupil of the Jesuits. An ardent, impetuous, over-genial temperament was the cause of frequent irregularities in conduct. But his quick and active understanding overcame all obstacles. His teachers, ever wisely on the alert for superior capacity, hoped to enlist his talents in the Order. Either they or he planned his escape from home, but his father got to hear of it. 'My grandfather,' says Diderot's daughter, 'kept the profoundest silence, but as he went off to bed

[1] Ibid., 364. [2] Ibid., 379.

took with him the keys of the yard door.' When he heard his son going down-stairs, he presented himself before him, and asked whither he was bound at twelve o'clock at night. 'To Paris,' replied the youth, 'where I am to join the Jesuits.' 'That will not be to-night; but your wishes shall be fulfilled. First let us have our sleep.' The next morning his father took two places in the coach, and carried him to Paris to the Collége d'Harcourt. He made all the arrangements, and wished his son good-bye. But the good man loved the boy too dearly to leave him without being quite at ease how he would fare; he had the patience to remain a whole fortnight, killing the time and half dead of weariness in an inn, without ever seeing the one object of his stay. At the end of the time, he went to the college, and Diderot used many a time to say that such a mark of tenderness and goodness would have made him go to the other end of the world, if his father had required it. 'My friend,' said his father, 'I am come to see if you are well, if you are satisfied with your superiors, with your food, with your companions, and with yourself. If you are not well or not happy, we will go back together to your mother. If you had rather stay where you are, I am come to give you a word, to embrace you, and to leave you my blessing.' The boy declared he was perfectly happy; and the principal pronounced him an excellent scholar, though already promising to be a troublesome one.[1]

After a couple of years the young Diderot, like

[1] *Œuv.*, i. 30.

other sons of Adam, had to think of earning his bread. The usual struggle followed between youthful genius and old prudence. His father, who was a man of substance, gave him his choice between medicine and law. Law he refused, because he did not choose to spend his days in doing other people's business; and medicine, because he had no turn for killing. His father resolutely declined to let him have more money on these terms, and Diderot was thrown on his wits.

The man of letters shortly before the middle of the century was as much of an outcast and a beggar in Paris as he was in London. Voltaire, Gray, and Richardson were perhaps the only three conspicuous writers of the time, who had never known what it was to want a meal or to go without a shirt. But then none of the three depended on his pen for his livelihood. Every other man of that day whose writings have delighted and instructed the world since, had begun his career, and more than one of them continued and ended it, as a drudge and a vagabond. Fielding and Collins, Goldsmith and Johnson, in England; Goldoni in Italy; Vauvenargues, Marmontel, Rousseau, in France; Winckelmann and Lessing in Germany, had all alike been doubtful of dinner and trembled about a night's lodging. They all knew the life of mean hazard, sorry shift, and petty expedient again and again renewed. It is sorrowful to think how many of the compositions of that time that do most to soothe and elevate some of the best hours of our lives, were written by men with aching hearts, in the midst

of haggard perplexities. The man of letters, as distinguished alike from the old-fashioned scholar and the systematic thinker, now first became a distinctly marked type. Macaulay has contrasted the misery of the Grub Street hack of Johnson's time, with the honours accorded to men like Prior and Addison at an earlier date, and the solid sums paid by booksellers to the authors of our own day. But these brilliant passages hardly go lower than the surface of the great change. Its significance lay quite apart from the prices paid for books. The all-important fact about the men of letters in France was that they constituted a new order, that their rise signified the transfer of the spiritual power from ecclesiastical hands, and that, while they were the organs of a new function, they associated it with a new substitute for doctrine. These men were not only the pupils of the Jesuits; they were also their immediate successors, as the teachers, the guides, and the directors of society. For two hundred years the followers of Ignatius had taken the intellectual and moral control of Catholic communities out of the failing hands of the Popes and the secular clergy. Their own hour had now struck. The rationalistic historian has seldom done justice to the services which this great Order rendered to European civilisation. The immorality of many of their maxims, their too frequent connivance at political wrong for the sake of power, their inflexible malice against opponents, and the cupidity and obstructiveness of the years of their decrepitude, have blinded us to the many meritorious

pages of the Jesuit chronicle. Even men like Diderot and Voltaire, whose lives were for years made bitter by Jesuit machinations, gave many signs that they recognised the aid which had been rendered by their old masters to the cultivation and enlightenment of Europe. It was from the Jesuit fathers that the men of letters, whom they trained, acquired that practical and social habit of mind which made the world and its daily interests so real to them. It was perhaps also his Jesuit preceptors whom the man of letters had to blame for a certain want of rigour and exactitude on the side of morality.

What was this new order which thus struggled into existence, which so speedily made itself felt, and at length so completely succeeded in seizing the lapsed inheritance of the old spiritual organization? What is this man of letters? A satirist may easily describe him in epigrams of cheap irony; the pedant of the colleges may see in him a frivolous and shallow profaner of the mysteries of learning; the intellectual coxcomb who nurses his own dainty wits in critical sterility, despises him as Sir Piercie Shafton would have despised Lord Lindsay of the Byres. This notwithstanding, the man of letters has his work to do in the critical period of social transition. He is to be distinguished from the great systematic thinker, as well as from the great imaginative creator. He is borne on the wings neither of a broad philosophic conception nor of a lofty poetic conception. He is only the propagator of portions of such conceptions, and of

the minor ideas which they suggest. Unlike the Jesuit father whom he replaced, he has no organic doctrine, no historic tradition, no effective discipline, and no definite, comprehensive, far-reaching, concentrated aim. The characteristic of his activity is dispersiveness. Its distinction is to popularise such detached ideas as society is in a condition to assimilate; to interest men in these ideas by dressing them up in varied forms of the literary art; to guide men through them by judging, empirically and unconnectedly, each case of conduct, of policy, or of new opinion as it arises. We have no wish to exalt the office. On the contrary I accept the maxim of that deep observer who warned us that 'the mania for isolation is the plague of the human throng, and to be strong we must march together. You only obtain anything by developing the spirit of discipline among men.'[1] But there are ages of criticism when discipline is impossible, and the evils of isolation are less than the evils of rash and premature organization.

Fontenelle was the first and in some respects the greatest type of this important class. He was sceptical, learned, ingenious, eloquent. He stretched hands (1657—1757) from the famous quarrel between Ancients and Moderns down to the Encyclopædia, and from Bossuet and Corneille down to Jean Jacques and

[1] *Wahlverwandschaften*, pt. ii. ch. vii. The reader will do well to consult the philosophical estimate of the function of the man of letters given by Comte, *Philosophie Positive*, v. 512, vi. 192, 287. The best contemporary account of the principles and policy of the men of letters in the eighteenth century is to be found in Condorcet's *Esquisse d'un Tableau, etc.*, p. 187–9 (Ed. 1847).

Diderot. When he was born, the man of letters did not exist. When he died, the man of letters was the most conspicuous personage in France. But when Diderot first began to roam about the streets of Paris, this enormous change was not yet complete.

For some ten years (1734—1744) Diderot's history is the old tale of hardship and chance; of fine constancy and excellent faith, not wholly free from an occasional stroke of rascality. For a time he earned a little money by teaching. If the pupil happened to be quick and docile, he grudged no labour and was content with any fee or none. If the pupil happened to be dull, Diderot never came again, and preferred going supperless to bed. His employers paid him as they chose, in shirts, in a chair or a table, in books, in money, and sometimes they never paid him at all. The prodigious exuberance of his nature inspired him with a sovereign indifference to material details. From the beginning he belonged to those to whom it comes by nature to count life more than meat, and the body than raiment. The outward things of existence were to him really outward. They never vexed or absorbed his days and nights, nor overcame his vigorous constitutional instinct for the true proportions of external circumstance. He was of the humour of the old philosopher, who, when he heard that all his worldly goods had been lost in a shipwreck, only made for answer, *Jubet me fortuna expeditius philosophari*. Once he had the good hap to be appointed tutor to the sons of a man of wealth. He performed his duties zealously,

he was well housed and well fed, and he gave the fullest satisfaction to his employer. At the end of three months the mechanical toil had grown unbearable to him. The father of his pupils offered him any terms if he would remain. 'Look at me, sir,' replied the tutor; 'my face is as yellow as a lemon. I am making men of your children, but each day I am becoming a child with them. I am a thousand times too rich and too comfortable in your house; leave it I must; what I want is not to live better, but to avoid dying.' Again he plunged from comfort into the life of the garret. If he met any old friend from Langres, he borrowed, and the honest father repaid the loan. His mother's savings were brought to him by a faithful creature who had long served in their house, and who now more than once trudged all the way from home on this errand, and added her own humble earnings to the little stock. Many a time the hours went very slowly for the necessitous man. One Shrove Tuesday he rose in the morning, and found his pockets empty even of so much as a halfpenny. His friends had not invited him to join their squalid Bohemian revels. Hunger and thoughts of old shrovetide merriment and feasting in the far-off home, made work impossible. He hastened out of doors and walked about all day, visiting such public sights as were open to the penniless. When he returned to his garret at night his landlady found him in a swoon, and with the compassion of a good soul she forced him to share her supper. 'That day' Diderot used to tell his children in later

years, 'I promised myself that if ever happier times should come, and ever I should have anything, I would never refuse help to any living creature, nor ever condemn him to the misery of such a day as that.'[1] And the real interest of the story lies in the fact that no oath was ever more faithfully kept. There is no greater test of the essential richness of a man's nature than that this squalid adversity, not of the sentimental introspective kind, but hard and grinding, and not even kept in countenance by respectability, fails to make him a savage or a miser or a misanthrope.

Diderot had his bitter moments. He knew the gloom and despondency that has its inevitable hour in every solitary and unordered life. But the fits did not last. They left no sour sediment and this is the sign of health in temperament, provided it be not due to mere callousness. From that horrible quality Diderot assuredly was the furthest removed of anyone of his time. Now and always he walked with a certain large carelessness of spirit. He measured life with a roving and liberal eye. Circumstance and conventions, the words under which men hide things, the oracles of common acceptance, the infinitely diversified properties of human character, the many complexities of our conduct and destiny,—all these he watched playing freely around him, and he felt no haste to compress his experience into maxims and system. He was absolutely uncramped by any of the formal mannerisms of the spirit. He was wholly un-

[1] Naigeon, p. 24.

corrupted by the affectation of culture with which the great Goethe infected part of the world a generation later. His own life was never made the centre of the world. Self-development and self-idealisation as ends in themselves would have struck Diderot as effeminate drolleries. The daily and hourly interrogation of experience for the sake of building up the fabric of his own character in this wise or that, would have been incomprehensible and a little odious to him in theory, and impossible as a matter of practice. In the midst of all the hardships of his younger time, as afterwards in the midst of crushing Herculean taskwork, he was saved from moral ruin by the inexhaustible geniality and expansiveness of his affections. Nor did he narrow their play by looking only to the external forms of human relation. To Diderot it came easily to act on a principle which most of us only accept in words: he looked not to what people said, nor even to what they did, but wholly to what they were.

Those whom he had once found reason to love and esteem might do him many an ill turn, without any fear of estranging him. Anyone can measure character by conduct. It is a harder thing to be willing, in cases that touch our own interests, to interpret conduct by previous knowledge of character. His father, for instance, might easily have spared money enough to save him from the harassing privations of Bohemian life in Paris. A less full-blooded and generous person than Diderot would have resented the stoutness of the old man's persistency. Diderot, on the contrary, felt,

and delighted to feel, that this conflict of wills was a mere accident which left undisturbed the reality of old love. 'The first few years of my life in Paris,' he once told an acquaintance, 'had been rather irregular; my behaviour was enough to irritate my father, without there being any need to make it worse by exaggeration. Still calumny was not wanting. People told him—well what did they not tell him? An opportunity for going to see him presented itself. I did not give it two thoughts. I set out full of confidence in his goodness. I thought that he would see me, that I should throw myself into his arms, that we should both of us shed tears, and that all would be forgotten. I thought rightly.'[1] We may be sure of a stoutness of native stuff in any stock, where so much tenacity united with such fine confidence on one side, and such generous love on the other. It is a common-place how much waste would be avoided in human life if men would more freely allow their vision to pierce in this way through the distorting veils of egoism, to the reality of sentiment and motive and relationship.

Throughout his life Diderot was blessed with that divine gift of Pity, which one that has it could hardly be willing to barter for the understanding of an Aristotle. Nor was it of the sentimental type proper for fine ladies. One of his friends had an aversion for women with child. 'What monstrous sentiment!' Diderot wrote; 'for my part, that condition has always touched me. I cannot see a woman of the common people so, without a tender

[1] *Œuv.*, xix. 162.

commiseration.'[1] And Diderot had delicacy and respect in his pity. He tells a story in one of his letters of a poor woman who had suffered some wrong from a priest; she had not money enough to resort to law, until a friend of Diderot took her part. The suit was gained; but when the moment came for execution, the priest had vanished with all his goods. The woman came to thank her protector, and to regret the loss he had suffered. 'As she chatted, she pulled a shabby snuff-box out of her pocket, and gathered up with the tip of her finger what little snuff remained at the bottom: her benefactor says to her, "Ah, ah! you have no more snuff; give me your box, and I will fill it." He took the box and put into it a couple of louis, which he covered up with snuff. Now there's an action thoroughly to my taste, and to yours too! Give, but if you can, spare to the poor the shame of holding out a hand.'[2] And the important thing, as we have said, is that Diderot was as good as his sentiment. Unlike most of the fine talkers of that day, to him these homely and considerate emotions were the most real part of life. Nobody in the world was ever more eager to give succour to others, nor more careless of his own ease.

One singular story of Diderot's heedlessness about himself has often been told before, but we shall be none the worse in an egoistic world for hearing it told again. There came to him one morning a young man bringing a manuscript in his hand. He begged Diderot to do him the favour of reading it, and to make any remarks

[1] Ibid., 89. [2] Ibid., 93.

he might think useful on the margin. Diderot found it to be a bitter satire upon his own person and writings. On the young man's return, Diderot asked him his grounds for making such an attack. 'I am without bread,' the satirist answered, 'and I hoped you might perhaps give me a few crowns not to print it.' Diderot at once forgot everything in pity for the starving scribbler. 'I will tell you a way of making more than that by it. The brother of the Duke of Orleans is one of the pious, and he hates me. Dedicate your satire to him, get it bound with his arms on the cover; take it to him some fine morning, and you will certainly get assistance from him.' 'But I don't know the prince, and the dedicatory epistle embarrasses me.' 'Sit down,' said Diderot, 'and I will write one for you.' The dedication was written, the author carried it to the prince, and received a handsome fee.[1]

Marmontel assures us that never was Diderot seen to such advantage as when an author consulted him about a work. 'You should have seen him,' he says, 'take hold of the subject, pierce to the bottom of it, and at a single glance discover of what riches and of what beauty it was susceptible. If he saw that the author missed the right track, instead of listening to the reading, he at once worked up in his head all that the author had left crude and imperfect. Was it a play, he threw new scenes into it, new incidents, new strokes of character; and thinking that he had actually heard all that he had dreamed, he extolled to the skies the

[1] *Œuv.*, i. xlviii

work that had just been read to him, and in which, when it saw the light, we found hardly anything that he had quoted from it. . . . He who was one of the most enlightened men of the century, was also one of the most amiable; and in everything that touched moral goodness, when he spoke of it freely, I cannot express the charm of his eloquence. His whole soul was in his eyes and on his lips; never did a countenance better depict the goodness of the heart.'[1] Morellet is equally loud in praise not only of Diderot's conversation, its brilliance, its vivacity, its fertility, its suggestiveness, its sincerity, but also of his facility and indulgence to all who sought him, and of the sympathetic readiness with which he gave the very best of himself to others.[2]

It is needless to say that such a temper was constantly abused. Three-fourths of Diderot's life were reckoned by his family to have been given up to people who had need of his purse, his knowledge, or his good offices. His daughter compares his library to a shop crowded by a succession of customers, but the customers took whatever wares they sought, not by purchase but by way of free gift. Luckily for Diderot he was thus generous by temperament, and not because he expected gratitude. Any necessitous knave with the gift of tears and the mask of sensibility could dupe and prey upon him. In one case he had taken a great deal of trouble for one of these needy and importunate clients; had given him money and advice, and had devoted much time to serve him. At the end of their last interview

[1] Marmontel, *Mém.*, vol. ii. b. vii. p. 315. [2] Morellet, *Mém.*, i. p. 29.

Diderot escorts his departing friend to the head of the staircase. The grateful client then asks him whether he knows natural history. 'Well, not much,' Diderot replies; 'I know an aloe from a lettuce, and a pigeon from a humming-bird.' 'Do you know about the *Formica leo?* No? Well, it is a little insect that is wonderfully industrious; it hollows out in the ground a hole shaped like a funnel, it covers the surface with a light fine sand, it attracts other insects, it takes them, it sucks them dry, and then it says to them, "Mr. Diderot, I have the honour to wish you good day."'[1]

Yet insolence and ingratitude made no difference to Diderot. His ear always remained as open to every tale of distress, his sensibility always as quickly touched, his time, money, and service always as profusely bestowed. I know not whether to say that this was made more, or that it was made less, of a virtue by his excess of tolerance for social castaways and reprobates. Our rough mode of branding a man as bad revolted him. The common appetite for constituting ourselves public prosecutors for the universe was to him one of the worst of human weaknesses. 'You know,' he used to say, 'all the impetuosity of the passions; you have weighed all circumstance in your everlasting balance; you pass sentence on the goodness or the badness of creatures; you set up rewards and penalties among matters which have no proportion nor relation with one another. Are you sure that you have never committed wrong acts for which you pardoned yourselves, because

[1] *Œuv.*, i. xlviii.

their object was so slight, though at bottom they implied more wickedness than a crime prompted by misery or fury? Even magistrates supported by experience, by the law, by conventions which force them sometimes to give judgment against the testimony of their own conscience, still tremble as they pronounce the doom of the accused. And since when has it been lawful for the same person to be at once judge and informer?'[1] Such reasoned leniency is the noblest of traits in a man. 'I am more affected,' he said, in words of which better men than Diderot might often be reminded, 'by the charms of virtue than by the deformity of vice; I turn mildly away from the bad, and I fly to embrace the good. If there is in a work, in a character, in a painting, in a statue, a single fine bit, then on that my eyes fasten; I see only that: that is all I remember; the rest is as good as forgotten.'[2]

This is the secret of a rare and admirable temperament. It carried Diderot well through the trial and ordeal of the ragged apprenticeship of letters. What to other men comes by culture, came to him by inborn force and natural capaciousness. We do not know in what way Diderot trained and nourished his understanding. The annotations to his translation of Shaftesbury, as well as his earliest original pieces, show that he had read Montaigne and Pascal, and not only read but meditated on them with an independent mind. They show also that he had been impressed by the Civitas Dei of Augustin, and had at least dipped into Terence and

[1] *Œuv.*, xix. 55. [2] Ibid. xviii. 376.

Horace, Cicero and Tacitus. His subsequent writings prove that, like the other men of letters of his day, he found in our own literature the chief external stimulant to thought. Above all, he was impressed by the magnificent ideas of the illustrious Bacon, and these ideas were the direct source of the great undertaking of Diderot's life. He is said to have read little, and to have meditated much—the right process for the few men of his potent stamp. The work which he had to do for bread, was of the kind that crushes anything short of the strongest faculty. He composed sermons. A missionary once ordered half-a-dozen of them for consumption in the Portuguese colonies, and paid him fifty crowns apiece, which Diderot counted far from the worst bargain of his life. All this was beggarly toil for a man of genius, but Diderot never took the trouble to think of himself as a man of genius, and was quite content with life as it came. If he found himself absolutely without food and without peace, he began moodily to think of abandoning his books and his pen, and of complying with the wishes of his father. A line of Homer, an idea from the Principia, an interesting problem in algebra or geometry, was enough to restore the eternally invincible spell of knowledge. And no sooner was this commanding interest touched, than the cloud of uncomfortable circumstance vanished from before the sun, and calm and serenity filled his spirit.

Montesquieu used to declare that he had never known a chagrin which half an hour of a book was not able to dispel. Diderot had the same fortunate temper.

Yet Diderot was not essentially a man of books. He never fell into the characteristic weakness of the follower of letters, by treating books as ends in themselves or placing literature before life. Character, passion, circumstance, the real tragi-comedy, not its printed shadow and image, engrossed him. He was in this respect more of the temper of Rousseau, than he was like Voltaire or Fontenelle. 'Abstraction made,' he used to say, 'of my existence and of the happiness of my fellows, what does the rest of nature matter to me?' Yet, as we see, nobody that ever lived was more interested in knowledge. His biographer and disciple remarked the contrast in him between his ardent impetuous disposition and enthusiasm, and his spirit of close unwearied observation. *Faire le bien, connaître le vrai,* was his formula for the perfect life, and defined the only distinction that he cared to recognise between one man and another. And the only motive he ever admitted as reasonable for seeking truth, was as a means of doing good. So strong was his sense of practical life in the midst of incessant theorising.

At the moment when he had most difficulty in procuring a little bread each day for himself, Diderot conceived a violent passion for a seamstress, Antoinnette Champion by name, who happened to live in his neighbourhood. He instantly became importunate for marriage. The mother long protested with prudent vigour against a young man of such head-

strong impetuosity, who did nothing and who had nothing, save the art of making speeches that turned her daughter's head. At length the young man's golden tongue won the mother as it had won the daughter. It was agreed that his wishes should be crowned, if he could procure the consent of his family. Diderot fared eagerly and with a sanguine heart to Langres. His father supposed that he had seen the evil of his ways, and was come at last to continue the honest tradition of their name. When the son disclosed the object of his visit, he was treated as a madman and threatened with malediction. Without a word of remonstrance he started back one day for Paris. Madame Champion warned him that his project must now be for ever at an end. Such unflinching resoluteness is often the last preliminary before surrender. Diderot fell ill. The two women could not bear to think of him lying sick in a room no better than a dog-kennel, without broths and tisanes, lonely and sorrowful. They hastened to nurse him, and when he got well, what he thought the great object of his life was reached. He and his adored were married (1743).[1] As has been said, 'Choice in marriage is a great match of cajolery between purpose and invisible hazard: deep criticism of a game of pure chance is time wasted.' In Diderot's case, destiny was hostile.

[1] Madame de Vandeul says 1744. But M. Jal (*Dict. Crit.*, 495) reproduces the certificate of the marriage. Perhaps we may charitably hope that Diderot himself is equally mistaken when in later years he sets down a disreputable adventure to 1744. (*Œuv.*, xix. 85.)

His wife was over thirty. She was dutiful, sage, and pious. She had plenty of that devotion which in small things women so seldom lack. While her husband went to dine out, she remained at home to dine and sup on dry bread, and was pleased to think that the next day she would double the little ordinary for him. Coffee was too dear to be a household luxury; so every day she handed him a few halfpence to have his cup and watch the chessplayers at the Café de la Régence. When after a year or two she went to make her peace with her father-in-law at Langres, she wound her way round the old man's heart by her affectionate caresses, her respect, her ready industry in the household, her piety, her simplicity. It is, however, unfortunately possible for even the best women to manifest their goodness, their prudence, their devotion, in forms that exasperate. Perhaps it was so here. Diderot at fifty was an orderly and steadfast person, but at thirty the blood of vagabondage was still hot within him. He needed in his companion a robust patience, to match his own too robust activity. One may suppose that if Mirabeau had married Hannah More, the match would have turned out ill, and Diderot's marriage was unluckily of such a type. His wife's narrow pieties and homely solicitudes fretted him. He had not learned to count the cost of deranging the fragile sympathy of the hearth. While his wife was away on her visit to his family, he formed a connection with a woman (Madame Puisieux) who seems to have been as bad and selfish as his wife was the opposite. She

was the authoress of some literary pieces, which the world willingly and speedily let die; but even very moderate pretensions to *bel-esprit* may have seemed wonderfully refreshing to a man wearied to death by the illiterate stupidity of his daily companion.[1] This lasted some three or four years down to 1749. As we shall see, he discovered the infidelity of his mistress and broke with her. But by this time his wife's virtues seem to have gone a little sour, as disregarded prudence and thwarted piety are so apt to do. It was too late now to knit up again the ravelled threads of domestic concord. During a second absence of his wife in Champagne (1754), he formed a new attachment to the daughter of a financier's widow (Mdlle. Voland). This lasted to the end of the lady's days (1774).

There is probably nothing very profitable to be said about all this domestic disorder. We do not know enough of the circumstances to be sure of allotting censure in exact and rightful measure. We have to remember that such irregularities were in the manners of the time. To connect them by way of effect with the new opinions in religion would be as impertinent as to trace the immoralities of Dubois or Lewis the Fifteenth or the Cardinal de Rohan to the old opinions.

[1] For an account of Madame de Puisieux in her later years, see Mdme. Roland's *Memoirs*, i. 156.

## *CHAPTER III.*

### *EARLY WRITINGS.*

LA ROCHEFOUCAULD, expressing a commonplace with the penetrative terseness that made him a master of the apophthegm, pronounced it 'not to be enough to have great qualities: a man must have the economy of them.' Or as another writer says:—'Empire in this world belongs not so much to wits, to talents, and to industry, as to a certain skilful economy and to the continual administration that a man has the art of applying to all his other gifts.'[1] Notwithstanding the peril that haunts superlative propositions, we are inclined to say that Diderot is the most striking illustration of this, that the history of letters or speculation has to furnish. If there are many who have missed the mark which they or kindly intimates thought them certain of attaining, this is mostly not for want of economy, but for want of the great qualities which were imputed to them by mistake. To be mediocre, to be sterile, to be futile, are the three fatal endings of many superbly announced potentialities. Such an end nearly always comes of exaggerated faculty, rather

[1] Sainte Beuve, *Causeries*, ix. 136.

than of bad administration of natural gifts. In Diderot were splendid talents. It was the art of prudent stewardship that lay beyond his reach. Hence this singular fact, that he perhaps alone in literature has left a name of almost the first eminence, and impressed his greatness upon men of the strongest and most different intelligence, and yet never produced a masterpiece; many a fine page, as Marmontel said, but no one fine work.

No man that ever wrote was more wholly free from that unquiet self-consciousness which too often makes literary genius pitiful or odious in the flesh. He put on no airs of pretended resignation to inferior production, with bursting hints of the vast superiorities that unfriendly circumstance locked up within him. Yet on one occasion, and only on one, so far as evidence remains, he indulged a natural regret. 'And so,' he wrote when revising the last sheets of the Encyclopædia (July 25, 1765), 'in eight or ten days I shall see the end of an undertaking that has occupied me for twenty years; that has not made my fortune by a long way; that has exposed me many a time to the risk of having to quit my country or lose my freedom; and that has consumed a life that I might have made both more useful and more glorious. The sacrifice of talent to need would be less common, if it were only a question of self. One could easily resolve rather to drink water and eat dry crusts and follow the bidding of one's genius in a garret. But for a woman and for children, what can one not resolve? If I sought to

make myself of some account in their eyes, I would not say,—I have worked thirty years for you; I would say,—I have for you renounced for thirty years the vocation of my nature; I have preferred to renounce my tastes in doing what was useful for you, instead of what was agreeable to myself. That is your real obligation to me, and of that you never think.'[1]

It is a question, nevertheless, whether Diderot would have achieved masterpieces, even if the pressure of housekeeping had never driven him to seek bread where he could find it. Indeed it is hardly a question. His genius was spacious and original, but it was too dispersive, too facile of diversion, too little disciplined, for the prolonged effort of combination which is indispensable to the greater constructions whether of philosophy or art. The excellent talent of economy and administration had been denied him; that thrift of faculty, which accumulates store and force for concentrated occasions. He was not encyclopædic by accident, nor merely from external necessity. The quality of rapid movement, impetuous fancy, versatile idea, which he traced to the climate of his birth-place, marked him from the first for an encyclopædic or some such task. His interest was nearly as promptly and vehemently kindled in one subject as in another; he was always boldly tentative, always fresh and vigorous in suggestion, always instant in search. But this multiplicity of active excitements, and with Diderot every interest rose to the warmth of excitement, was even

[1] xix. 159. See also *Salons*, 1767, No. 118.

more hostile to masterpieces than were the exigencies of a livelihood. It was not unpardonable in a moment of exhaustion and chagrin to fancy that he had offered up the treasures of his genius to the dull gods of the hearth. But if he had been childless and unwedded, the result would have been the same. He is the munificent prodigal of letters, always believing his substance inexhaustible, never placing a limit to his fancies nor a bound to his outlay. 'It is not they who rob me of my life,' he wrote; 'it is I who give it to them. And what can I do better than accord a portion of it to him who esteems me enough to solicit such a gift? I shall get no praise for it, 'tis true, either now while I am here, nor when I shall exist no longer; but I shall esteem myself for it, and people will love me all the better for it. 'Tis no bad exchange, that of benevolence against a celebrity that one does not always win, and that nobody wins without a drawback. I have never once regretted the time that I have given to others; I can scarcely say as much for the time that I have used for myself.'[1] Remembering how uniformly men of letters take themselves somewhat too seriously, we may be sorry that this unique figure among them, who was in other respects constituted to be so considerable and so effective, did not take himself seriously enough.

Apart from his moral inaptitude for the monumental achievements of authorship, Diderot was endowed with the gifts of the talker rather than with those of the

[1] *Les Règnes de Claude et de Néron*, § 79.

writer. Like Dr. Johnson, he was a great converser, rather than the author of great books. If we turn to his writings, we are at some loss to understand the secret of his reputation. They are too often declamatory, ill-compacted, broken by frequent apostrophes, ungainly, dislocated, and rambling. He has been described by a consummate judge as the most German of all the French. And his style is deeply marked by that want of feeling for the exquisite, that dulness of edge, that bluntness of stroke, which is the common note of all German literature save a little of the very highest. In conversation we do not insist on constant precision of phrase, nor on elaborate sustention of argument. Apostrophe is made natural by the semi-dramatic quality of the situation. Even vehement hyperbole, which is nearly always a disfigurement in written prose, may become impressive or delightful, when it harmonizes with the voice, the glance, the gesture of a fervid and exuberant converser. Hence Diderot's personality invested his talk, as happened in the case of Johnson and of Coleridge, with an imposing interest and a power of inspiration which we should never comprehend from the mere perusal of his writings.

His admirers declared his head to be the ideal head of an Aristotle or a Plato. His brow was wide, lofty, open, gently rounded. The arch of the eyebrow was full of delicacy; the nose of masculine beauty; the habitual expression of the eyes kindly and sympathetic, but as he grew heated in talk, they sparkled like fire; the curves of the mouth bespoke an interesting mixture

of finesse, grace, and geniality. His bearing was nonchalant enough, but there was naturally in the carriage of his head, especially when he talked with action, much dignity, energy, and nobleness. It seemed as if enthusiasm were the natural condition for his voice, for his spirit, for every feature. He was only truly Diderot, when his thoughts had transported him beyond himself. His ideas were stronger than himself; they swept him along without the power either to stay or to guide their movement. 'When I recall Diderot,' wrote one of his friends, 'the immense variety of his ideas, the amazing multiplicity of his knowledge, the rapid flight, the warmth, the impetuous tumult of his imagination, all the charm and all the disorder of his conversation, I venture to liken his character to nature herself, exactly as he used to conceive her—rich, fertile, abounding in germs of every sort, gentle and fierce, simple and majestic, worthy and sublime, but without any dominating principle, without a master and without a God.'[1] Grétry, the musical composer, declares that Diderot was one of the rare men who had the art of blowing the spark of genius into flame; the first impulses stirred by his glowing imagination were of inspiration divine.[2] Marmontel warns us that he who only knows Diderot in his writings, does not know him at all. We should have listened to his persuasive eloquence, and seen his face aglow with the fire of enthusiasm. It was when he grew animated in

[1] Account of Diderot by Meister, printed in Grimm's *Correspondance Littéraire*, xiii. 202–11.

[2] Grétry, quoted in Genin's *Œuv. choisies de Diderot*, 42.

talk, and let all the abundance of his ideas flow freely from the source, that he became truly ravishing. In his writings, says Marmontel with obvious truth, he never had the art of forming a whole, and this was because that first process of arranging everything in its place was too slow and too tiresome for him. The want of ensemble vanished in the free and varied course of conversation.[1]

We have to remember then that Diderot was in this respect of the Socratic type, though he was unlike Socrates, in being the disseminator of positive and constructive ideas. His personality exerted a decisive force and influence. In reading the testimony of his friends, we think of the young Aristides saying to Socrates: 'I always made progress whenever I was in your neighbourhood, even if I were only in the same house, without being in the same room; but my advancement was greater if I were in the same room with you, and greater still if I could keep my eyes fixed upon you.'[2] It has been well said that Diderot, like Socrates, had about him a something dæmonic. He was possessed, and so had the first secret of possessing others. But then to reach excellence in literature, one must also have self-possession; a double current of impulse and deliberation; a free stream of ideas spontaneously obeying a sense of order, harmony, and form. Eloquence in the informal discourse of the parlour or the country walk did not mean in Diderot's case the

[1] Marmontel, *Mém.*, bk. vii., vol. ii., 312.
[2] Plato, *Theages*, 130, c.

empty fluency and nugatory emphasis of the ordinary talker of reputation. It must have been both pregnant and copious; declamatory in form, but fresh and substantial in matter; excursive in arrangement, but forcible and pointed in intention. No doubt, if he was a sage, he was sometimes a sage in a frenzy. He would wind up a peroration by dashing his nightcap passionately against the wall, by way of clencher to the argument. Yet this impetuosity, this turn for declamation, did not hinder his talk from being directly instructive. Younger men of the most various type, from Morellet down to Joubert, men quite competent to detect mere bombast or ardent vagueness, were held captive by the cogency of his understanding. His writings have none of this compulsion. We see the flame, but through a veil of interfused smoke. The expression is not obscure, but it is awkward; not exactly prolix, but heavy, overcharged, and opaque. We miss the vivid precision and the high spirits of Voltaire, the glow and the brooding sonorousness of Rousseau, the pomp of Buffon. To Diderot we go not for charm of style, but for a store of fertile ideas, for some striking studies of human life, and for a vigorous and singular personality.

Diderot's knowledge of our language now did him good service. One of the details of the method by which he taught himself English is curious. Instead of using an Anglo-French dictionary, he always used one in Anglo-Latin. The sense of a Latin or Greek

word, he said, is better established, more surely fixed, more definite, less liable to capricious peculiarities of convention, than the vernacular words which the whim or ignorance of the lexicographer may choose. The reader composes his own vocabulary, and gains both correctness and energy.[1] However this may be, his knowledge of English was more accurate than is possessed by most French writers of our own day. Diderot's first work for the booksellers after his marriage seems to have been a translation in three volumes of Stanyan's History of Greece. For this, to the amazement of his wife, he got a hundred crowns. About the same time (1745) he published Principles of Moral Philosophy, or an Essay of Mr. S. on Merit and Virtue. The initial stands for Shaftesbury, and the book translated was his Inquiry concerning Virtue and Merit.

Towards the same time Diderot probably made acquaintance with Madame de Puisieux, of whom it has been said with too patent humour that she was without either the virtue or the merit on which her admirer had just been declaiming. We are told that it was her need of money which inspired him with his first original work. As his daughter's memoir, from which the tale comes, is swarming with blunders, this may not be more true than some of her other statements. All that we know of Diderot's sense and sincerity entitles him to the benefit of the doubt. The Philosophical Thoughts (1746) are a continuation of the vein

[1] Art. *Encyclopédie.*

of the annotations on the Essay. He is said to have thrown these reflections together between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Nor is there anything incredible in such rapid production, when we remember the sweeping impetuosity with which he flung himself into all that he undertook. The Thoughts are evidently the fruit of long meditation, and the literary arrangement of them may well have been an easy task. They are a robuster development of the scepticism which was the less important side of Shaftesbury. The parliament of Paris ordered the book to be burnt along with some others (July 7, 1746), partly because they were heterodox, partly because the practice of publishing books without official leave was gaining an unprecedented height of licence.[1] This was Diderot's first experience of that hand of authority, which was for thirty years to surround him with mortification and torment. But the disapproval of authority did not check the circulation or influence of the Thoughts. They were translated into German and Italian, and were honoured by a shower of hostile criticism. In France they were often reprinted, and even in our own day they are said not wholly to have lost their vogue as a short manual of scepticism.[2]

The historians of literature too often write as if a book were the cause or the controlling force of controversies in which it is really only a symbol, or a proclamation of feelings already in men's minds. We should

[1] See Barbier's Journal, iv. 166.

[2] The book was among those found in possession of the unfortunate La Barre.

never occupy ourselves in tracing the thread of a set of opinions, without trying to recognise the movement of living men and concrete circumstance that accompanied and caused the progress of thought. In watching how the beacon-fire flamed from height to height,—

*φάος δὲ τηλέπομπον οὐκ ἠναίνετο*
*φρουρὰ, προσαιθρίζουσα πύμπιμονφλύγα,—*

we should not forget that its source and reference lie in action, in the motion and stirring of confused hosts and multitudes of men. A book, after all, is only the mouthpiece of its author, and the author being human is moved and drawn by the events that occur under his eye. It was not merely because Bacon and Hobbes and Locke had written certain books, that Voltaire and Diderot became free-thinkers and assailed the church. 'So long,' it has been said, 'as a Bossuet, a Fénelon, an Arnauld, a Nicole, were alive, Bayle made few proselytes; the elevation of Dubois and its consequences multiplied unbelievers and indifferents.'[1] The force of speculative literature always hangs on practical opportuneness. The economic evils of monasticism, the increasing flagrancy and grossness of superstition, the aggressive factiousness of the ecclesiastics, the cruelty of bigoted tribunals,—these things disgusted and wearied the more enlightened spirits, and the English philosophy only held out an inspiring intellectual alternative.[2]

[1] Hoeggger's *Kritische Geschichte der französischen Culturcinflüsse in den letzten Jahrhunderten*, pp. 267–73.

[2] "Es ist nicht gleichgültig ob eine Folge grosser Gedanken in frischer Ursprünglichkeit auf die Zeitgenossen wirkt, oder ob sie zu einer Mixtur

Nor was it accident that drew Diderot's attention to Shaftesbury, rather than to any other of our writers. That author's essay on Enthusiasm had been suggested by the extravagances of the French prophets, poor fanatics from the Cevennes, who had fled to London after the revocation of the edict of Nantes, and whose paroxysms of religious hysteria at length brought them into trouble with the authorities (1707). Paris saw an outbreak of the same kind of ecstasy, though on a much more formidable scale, among the Jansenist fanatics from 1727 down to 1758 or later. Some of the best attested miracles in the whole history of the supernatural were wrought at the tomb of the Jansenist deacon Pâris.[1] The works of faith exalted multitudes into convulsive transports; men and women underwent the most cruel tortures in the hope of securing a descent upon them of the divine grace. The sober citizen whose journal is so useful a guide to domestic events in France from the Regency to the peace of 1763, tells us the effect of this hideous revival upon public sentiment. People began to see, he says, what they were to think of the miracles of antiquity. The more they went into these matters, whether miracles

mit reichlichem Zusatz überlieferter Vorurtheile verarbeitet ist. Ebensowenig ist est gleichgültig welcher Stimmung, welchem Zustande der Geister eine neue Lehre begegnet. Man darf aber kühn behaupten, dass für die volle durchführung der von Newton angebahnten Weltanschauung weder eine günstigere Naturanlage, noch eine günstigere Stimmung getroffen werden konnte als die der Franzosen im 18. Jahrhundert." (Lange's *Gesch. d. Materialismus*, i. 303.) But the writer, like most historians of opinion, does not dwell sufficiently on the co-operation of external social conditions with the progress of logical inference.

[1] See Montgeron's *La Vérité des Miracles de M. de Pâris démontrée* (1737) —an interesting contribution to the pathology of the human mind.

or prophecies, the more obscurity they discovered in the one, the more doubt about the other. Who could tell that they had not been accredited and established in remote times with as little foundation as what was then passing under men's very eyes. Just in the same way, the violent and prolonged debates, the intrigue, the tergiversation, which attended the acceptance of the famous Bull Unigenitus, taught shrewd observers how it is that religions establish themselves. They also taught how little respect is due in our minds and consciences to the great points which the universal church claims to have decided.[1]

These are the circumstances which explain the rude and vigorous scepticism of Diderot's first performances. And they explain the influence of Shaftesbury over him. Neither Diderot nor his contemporaries were ready at once to plunge into the broader and firmer negation to which they afterwards committed themselves. No doubt some of the politeness which he shows to Christianity, both in the notes to his translation of Shaftesbury, and in his own Philosophic Thoughts, is no more than an ironical deference to established prejudices. The notes to the Essay on Merit and Virtue show that Diderot, like all the other French revolters against established prejudice, had been deeply influenced by the shrewd-witted Montaigne. But the ardour of the disciple pressed objections home with a trenchancy that is very unlike the sage distillations of the master. It was from Shaftesbury, however, that he borrowed

[1] Barbier, 168, 244, &c.

common sense as a philosophic principle. Shaftesbury had indirectly drawn it from Locke, and through Hutcheson it became the source and sponsor of the Scottish philosophy of that century. This was a weapon exactly adapted for dealing with a theology that was discredited in the eyes of all cool observers by the hysterical extravagances of one set of religionists, and the factious pretensions of their rivals. And no other weapon was at hand. The historic or critical method of investigation was impossible, for the age did not possess the requisite learning. The indirect attack from the side of physical science was equally impossible. The bearing of Newton's great discovery on the current conceptions of the Creator and the supposed system of the divine government, was not yet fully realised. The other scientific ideas which have since made the old hypotheses less credible, were not at that time even conceived.

Diderot did indeed perceive even so early as this that the controversy was passing from the metaphysicians to the physicists. Though he for the moment misinterpreted the ultimate direction of the effect of experimental discovery, he discerned its potency in the field of theological discussion. 'It is not from the hands of the metaphysician,' he said, 'that atheism has received the weightiest strokes. The sublime meditations of Malebranche and Descartes were less calculated to shake materialism than a single observation of Malpighi's. If this dangerous hypothesis is tottering in our days, it is to experimental physics that such a result is due.

It is only in the works of Newton, of Muschenbroek, of Hartzoeker, and of Nieuwentit, that people have found satisfactory proofs of the existence of a being of sovereign intelligence. Thanks to the works of these great men, the world is no longer a god; it is a machine with its cords, its pulleys, its springs, its weights.'[1] In other words, Diderot had as yet not made his way beyond the halting-place which has been the favourite goal of English physicists from Newton down to Faraday.[2] Consistent materialism had not yet established itself in his mind. Meanwhile he laid about him with his common sense, just as Voltaire did, though Diderot has more weightiness of manner. If his use of the weapon cannot be regarded as a decisive settlement of the true issues, we have to remember that he himself became aware in a very short time of its inadequateness, and proceeded to the discussion, as we shall presently see, from another side.

The scope of the Philosophical Thoughts, and the attitude of Diderot's mind when they were written, may be shown in a few brief passages. The opening words point to the significance of the new time in one direction, and they are the key-note to Diderot's whole character. 'People are for ever declaiming against the passions; they set down to them all the pains that man endures, and quite forget that they are also the source of all his pleasures. It is regarded as an affront to reason if one dares to say a word in favour of its rivals. Yet it is only passions, and strong passions,

[1] *Pensées Philosophiques*, xviii. [2] On this, see Lange, i., 294.

that can raise the soul to great things. Sober passions produce only the commonplace. Deadened passions degrade men of extraordinary quality. Constraint annihilates the greatness and energy of nature. See that tree; 'tis to the luxury of its branches that you owe the freshness and the wide-spreading breadth of its shade, which you may enjoy till winter comes to despoil it of its leafy tresses. An end to all excellence in poetry, in painting, in music, as soon as superstition has once wrought upon human temperament the effect of old age! It is the very climax of madness to propose to one's self the ruin of the passions. A fine design truly in your pietist, to torment himself like a convict in order to desire nothing, love nothing, feel nothing; and he would end by becoming a true monster, if he were to succeed!'[1] Many years afterwards he wrote in the same sense to Madame Voland. 'I have ever been the apologist of strong passions; they alone move me. Whether they inspire me with admiration or horror, I feel vehemently. If atrocious deeds that dishonour our nature are due to them, it is by them also that we are borne to the marvellous endeavour that elevates it. The man of mediocre passion lives and dies like the brute.' And so forth, until the writer is carried to the perplexing position that 'if we were bound to choose between Racine, a bad husband, a bad father, a false friend, and a sublime poet, and Racine, good father, good husband, good friend, and dull worthy man, I hold to the first. Of Racine, the bad man, what

[1] *Pensées Philosophiques. Œuv.* i. 128-9.

remains? Nothing. Of Racine, the man of genius? The work is eternal.'[1] Without attempting to solve this problem in casuistry, we recognise Diderot's mood, and the hatred with which it would be sure to inspire him for the starved and mutilated passions of the Christian type. The humility, chastity, obedience, indolent solitude, which had for centuries been glorified by the church, were monstrous to this vehement and energetic spirit. The church had placed heroism in effacement. Diderot, borne to the other extreme, left out even discipline. To turn from his maxims on the foundation of conduct, to his maxims on opinion. As we have said, his attitude is that of the sceptic:—

What has never been put in question, has not been proved. What people have not examined without prepossessions, they have not examined thoroughly. Scepticism is the touchstone. (§ 31).

Incredulity is sometimes the vice of a fool, and credulity the defect of a man of intelligence. The latter sees far into the immensity of the Possible; the former scarcely sees anything possible beyond the Actual. Perhaps this is what produces the timidity of the one, and the temerity of the other. (§ 32.)

A demi-scepticism is the mark of a feeble understanding. It reveals a pusillanimous reasoner, who suffers himself to be alarmed by consequences; a superstitious creature, who thinks he is honouring God by the fetters which he imposes on his reason; a kind of unbeliever who is afraid of unmasking himself to him-

[1] *Œuv.* xix. 87. Grimm, Supp. 148.

self. For if truth has nothing to lose by examination, as is the demi-sceptic's conviction, what does he think in the bottom of his heart of those privileged notions which he fears to sound, and which are placed in one of the recesses of his brain, as in a sanctuary to which he dares not draw nigh? (§ 34.)

Scepticism does not suit everybody. It supposes profound and impartial examination. He who doubts because he does not know the grounds of credibility, is no better than an ignoramus. The true sceptic has counted and weighed the reasons. But it is no light matter to weigh arguments. Who of us knows their value with any nicety? Every mind has its own telescope. An objection that disappears in your eyes, is a colossus in mine: you find an argument trivial that to me is overwhelming. . . . If then it is so difficult to weigh reasons, and if there are no questions which have not two sides, and nearly always in equal measure, how come we to decide with such rapidity? (§ 24.)

When the pious cry out against scepticism, it seems to me that they do not understand their own interest, or else that they are inconsistent. If it is certain that a true faith to be embraced, and a false faith to be abandoned, need only to be thoroughly known, then surely it must be highly desirable that universal doubt should spread over the surface of the earth, and that all nations should consent to have the truth of their religions examined. Our missionaries would find a good half of their work done for them. (§ 36.)

One thing to be remembered is that Diderot, like Vauvenargues, Voltaire, Condorcet, always had Pascal in his mind, when dealing with apologetics. They all recognised in him a thinker with a love of truth, as distinguished from the mere priest, Catholic, Anglican, Brahman, or another. 'Pascal,' says Diderot, 'was upright, but he was timid and inclined to credulity. An elegant writer and a profound reasoner, he would doubtless have enlightened the world, if providence had not abandoned him to people who sacrificed his talents to their own antipathies. How much to be regretted, that he did not leave to the theologians of his time the task of settling their own differences; that he did not give himself up to the search for truth, without reserve and without the fear of offending God by using all the intelligence that God had given him. How much to be regretted that he took for masters men who were not worthy to be his disciples, and was foolish enough to think Arnauld, De Sacy, and Nicole, better men than himself.' (§ 14.) The Philosophic Thoughts are designed for an answer in form to the more famous Thoughts of this champion of the popular theology. The first of the following extracts, for instance, recalls a memorable illustration of Pascal's sublime pessimism. A few passages will illustrate sufficiently the line of argument which led the foremost men at the opening of the philosophic revolution to reject the pretensions of Christianity:—

What voices! what cries! what groans! Who is it

that has shut up in dungeons all these piteous souls? What crimes have the poor wretches committed? Who condemns them to such torments? *The God whom they have offended.* Who then is this God? *A God full of goodness.* But would a God full of goodness take delight in bathing himself in tears? If criminals had to calm the furies of a tyrant, what would they do more? . . . There are people of whom we ought not to say that they fear God, but that they are horribly afraid of him. . . . Judging from the picture they paint of the supreme being, from his wrath, from the rigour of his vengeance, from certain comparisons expressive of the ratio between those whom he leaves to perish and those to whom he deigns to stretch out a hand, the most upright soul would be tempted to wish that such a being did not exist. (§ 7—9.)

You present to an unbeliever a volume of writings of which you claim to show him the divinity. But, before going into your proofs, he will be sure to put some questions about your collection. Has it always been the same? Why is it less ample now than it was some centuries ago? By what right have they banished this work or that which another sect reveres, and preserved this or that which the other has repudiated? . . . You only answer all these difficulties by the avowal that the first foundations of the faith are purely human; that the choice between the manuscripts, the restoration of passages, finally the collection, has been made according to rules of criticism. Well, I do not refuse to concede to the divinity of the

sacred books a degree of faith proportioned to the certainty of these rules. (§ 59.)

People agree that it is of the last importance to employ none but solid arguments for the defence of a creed. Yet they would gladly persecute those who attempt to cry down the bad arguments. What then, is it not enough to be a Christian? Am I also to be one upon wrong grounds? (§ 57.)

The less probability a fact has, the more does the testimony of history lose its weight. I should have no difficulty in believing a single honest man who should tell me that the king had just won a complete victory over the allies. But if all Paris were to assure me that a dead man had come to life again, I should not believe a word of it. That a historian should impose upon us, or that a whole people should be mistaken—there is no miracle in that. (§ 46.)

What is God? A question that we put to children, and that philosophers have much trouble to answer. We know the age at which a child ought to learn to read, to sing, to dance, to begin Latin or geometry. It is only in religion that you take no account of his capacity. He scarcely hears what you say, before he is asked, What is God? It is at the same instant, from the same lips, that he learns that there are ghosts, goblins, were-wolves—and a God. (§ 25.)

The diversity of religious opinions has led the deists to invent an argument that is perhaps more singular than sound. Cicero, having to prove that the Romans were the most warlike people in the world, adroitly

draws this conclusion from the lips of their rivals. Gauls, to whom, if to any, do you yield the palm for courage? To the Romans. Parthians, after you, who are the bravest of men? The Romans. Africans, whom would you fear, if you were to fear any? The Romans. Let us interrogate the religionists in this fashion, say the deists. Chinese, what religion would be the best, if your own were not the best? Natural religion. Mussulmans, what faith would you embrace, if you abjured Mahomet? Naturalism. Christians, what is the true religion, if it be not Christianity? Judaism. But you, O Jews, what is the true religion, if Judaism be false? Naturalism. Now those, continues Cicero, to whom the second place is awarded by unanimous consent, and who do not in turn concede the first place to any,—those incontestably deserve that place. (§ 62.)

In all this we notice one constant characteristic of the eighteen century controversy about revealed religion. The assailant demands of the defender an answer to all the intellectual or logical objections that could possibly be raised by one who had never been a Christian, and who refused to become a Christian until these objections could be met. No account is taken of the mental conditions by which a creed is engendered and limited; nor of the train of historic circumstance which prepares men to receive it. The modern apologist escapes by explaining religion; the apologist of a hundred years ago was required to prove it. The end

of such a method was inevitably a negation. The objective propositions of a creed with supernatural pretensions can never be demonstrated from natural or rationalistic premisses. And if they could be so demonstrated, it would only be on grounds that are equally good for some other creeds with the same pretensions. The sceptic was left triumphantly weighing one revealed system against another in an equal balance.[1]

The position of the writer of the Philosophical Thoughts is distinctly theistic. Yet there is at least one striking passage to show how forcibly some of the arguments on the other side impressed him. 'I open,' says Diderot, 'the pages of a celebrated professor, and I read—"Atheists, I concede to you that movement is essential to matter; what conclusion do you draw from that? That the world results from the fortuitous concourse of atoms? You might as well say that Homer's Iliad, or Voltaire's Henriade, is a result of the fortuitous concourse of written characters." Now for my part, I should be very sorry to use that reasoning to an atheist; the comparison would give him

[1] Volney, in a book that was famous in its day, *Les Ruines, ou Méditation sur les révolutions des empires* (1791), resorted to a slight difference of method. Instead of leaving the pretensions of the various creeds to cancel one another, he invented a rather striking scene, in which the priests of each creed are made to listen to the professions of their rival, and then inveigh against his superstition and inconsistency. The assumption on which Diderot's argument rests is, that as so many different creeds all make the same exclusive claim, the claim is equally false throughout. Volney's argument turns more directly on the merits, and implies that all religions are equally morbid or pathological products, because they all lead to conduct condemned by their own most characteristic maxims. Volney's concrete presentation of comparative religion was highly effective for destructive purposes, though it would now be justly thought inadequate. (See *Œuvres de Volney*, i. 109, &c.)

a very easy game to play. According to the laws of the analysis of chances, he would say to me, I ought not to be surprised that a thing comes to pass when it is possible, and the difficulty of the event is compensated by the number of throws. There is a certain number of throws in which I would safely back myself to bring 100,000 sixes at once with 100,000 dice. Whatever the definite number of the letters with which I am invited fortuitously to produce the Iliad, there is a certain definite number of throws which would make the proposal advantageous for me: nay, my advantage would be infinite, if the quantity of throws accorded to me were infinite. Now, you grant to me that matter exists from all eternity, and that movement is essential to it. In return for this concession, I will suppose with you that the world has no limits; that the multitude of atoms was infinite, and that this order, which astonishes you, nowhere contradicts itself. Well, from these reciprocal admissions there follows nothing else unless it be this, that the possibility of engendering the universe fortuitously is very small, but that the number of throws is infinite, or, in other words, that *the difficulty of the event is more than sufficiently compensated by the multitude of the throws. Therefore, if anything ought to be repugnant to reason, it is the supposition that,—matter being in motion from all eternity, and there being perhaps in the infinite number of possible combinations an infinite number of admirable arrangements,—none of these admirable arrangements would have been met with out of the infinite multitude*

*of all those which matter successively took on. Therefore the mind ought to be more astonished at the hypothetical duration of chaos.'* [1] (§ 21.)

In a short continuation of the Philosophical Thoughts, entitled On the Sufficiency of Natural Religion, Diderot took the next step, and turned towards that faith which the votaries of each creed allow to be the best after their own. Even here he is still in the atmosphere of negation. He desires no more than to show that revealed religion confers no advantages which are not already secured by natural religion. 'The revealed law contains no moral precept which I do not find recommended and practised under the law of nature; therefore it has taught us nothing new upon morality. The revealed law has brought us no new truth; for what is a truth, but a proposition referring to an object, conceived in terms which present clear ideas to me, and the connection of which with one another is intelligible to me? Now revealed religion has introduced no such propositions to us. What it has added to the natural law consists of five or six propositions which are not a whit more intelligible to me, than if they were expressed in ancient Carthaginian, inasmuch as the ideas represented by the terms, and the connection among these ideas, escape me entirely.' [2]

There is no sign in this piece that Diderot had examined the positive grounds of natural religion, or that he was ready with any adequate answer to the argu-

[1] See on this, Lange, ii. 308.

[2] *De la Suffisance de la Religion Naturelle*, § 5.

ment which Butler had brought forward in the previous decade of the century. We do not see that he is aware as yet of there being as valid objections, on his own sceptical principles, to the alleged data of naturalistic deism, as to the pretensions of a supernatural religion. He was content with Shaftesbury's position.

Shaftesbury's influence on Diderot was permanent. It did not long remain so full and entire as it was now in the sphere of religious belief, but the traces of it never disappeared from his notions on morals and art. Shaftesbury's cheerfulness and geniality in philosophizing were thoroughly sympathetic to Diderot. The optimistic harmony which the English philosopher, coming after Leibnitz, assumed as the starting-point of his ethical and religious ideas, was not only highly congenial to Diderot's sanguine temperament; it was a most attractive way of escape from the disorderly and confused theological wilderness of sin, asceticism, miracle, and the other monkeries. This naturalistic religion may seem a very unsafe and comfortless halting-place to us. But to men who heard of religion only in connection with the Bull Unigenitus and confessional certificates, with some act of intolerance or cruelty, with futile disputes about grace and the Five Propositions, the naturalism which Shaftesbury taught in prose and Pope versified was like the dawn after the foulness of night. Those who wished to soften the inhuman rigour of the criminal procedure of the time,[1] used to

[1] It is well to remember that torture was not abolished in France until the Revolution. A Catholic writer makes the following judicious remark:—"We cannot study the eighteenth century, without being struck by the

appeal from customary ordinances and written laws to the law natural. The law natural was announced to have preceded any law of human devising. In the same way, those who wished to disperse the darkness of unintelligible dogmas and degraded ecclesiastical usages, appealed to the simplicity, light, and purity of that natural religion which was supposed to have been overlaid and depraved by the special superstitions of the different communities of the world.

'Pope's Essay on Man,' wrote Voltaire after his return from England (1728), 'seems to me the finest didactic poem, the most useful, the most sublime, that was ever written in any tongue. 'Tis true the whole substance of it is to be found in Shaftesbury's Characteristics, and I do not know why Pope gives all the honour of it to Bolingbroke, without saying a word of the celebrated Shaftesbury, the pupil of Locke.'[1] The ground of this enthusiastic appreciation of the English naturalism was not merely that it made morality independent of religion, which Shaftesbury took great pains to do. It also identified religion with all that is beautiful and harmonious in the universal scheme. It sur-

immoral consequences that inevitably followed for the population of Paris from the frequency and the hideous details of criminal executions. In reading the journals of the time, we are amazed at the place taken in popular life by the scenes of the Grève. It was the theatre of the day. The gibbet and the wheel did their work almost periodically, and people looked on while poor wretches writhed in slow agony all day long. Sometimes the programme was varied by decapitation and even by the stake. Torture had its legends and its heroes—the every-day talk of the generation which, having begun by seeing Damiens torn by red-hot pincers, was to end by rending Foulon limb from limb." (Carné, *Monarchie française au 18ième Siècle*, p. 493).

[1] *Lettres sur les Anglais*, xxiii.

rounded the new faith with a pure and lofty poetry that enabled it to confront the old on more than equal terms of dignity and elevation. Shaftesbury, and Diderot after him, ennobled human nature by placing the principle of virtue, the sense of goodness, within the breast of man. Diderot held to this idea throughout, as we shall see. That he did so explains a kind of phraseology about virtue and morality in his letters to Madame Voland and elsewhere, which would otherwise sound disagreeably like cant. Finally, Shaftesbury's peculiar attribution of beauty to morality, his reference of ethical matters to a kind of taste, the tolerably equal importance attributed by him to a sense of beauty and to the moral sense, all impressed Diderot with a mark that was not effaced. In the text of the Inquiry the author pronounces it a childish affectation in the eyes of any man who weighs things maturely, to deny that there is in moral beings, just as in corporeal objects, a true and essential beauty, a real sublime. The eagerness with which Diderot seized on this idea from the first, is shown in the declamatory foot-note which he here appends to his original.[1] It was the source, by a process of inverted application, of that ethical colouring in his criticisms on art, which made them so new and so interesting, because it carried æsthetic beyond technicalities, and associated it with the real impulses and circumstances of human life.[2]

[1] *Essai sur le Mérite*, I. ii. § 3. (*Œuv.*, i. 33.

[2] "Shaftesbury is one of the most important apparitions of the eighteenth century. All the greatest spirits of that time, not only in England, but

One of Diderot's writings composed about our present date (1747), the Promenade du Sceptique, did not see the light until after his death. His daughter tells us that a police agent came one day to the house, and proceeded to search the author's room. He found a manuscript, said, 'Good, that is what I am looking for,' thrust it into his pocket, and went away. Diderot did his best to recover his piece, but never succeeded.[1] A copy of it came into the hands of Naigeon, and it seems to have been retained by Malesherbes, the director of the press, out of good-will to the author. If it had been printed, it would certainly have cost him a sojourn in Vincennes.

We have at first some difficulty in realising how the police could know the contents of an obscure author's desk. For one thing we have to remember that Paris, though it had been enormously increased in the days of Law and the System (1719–20), was still of a comparatively manageable size. In 1720, though the population of the whole realm was only fourteen or fifteen millions, that of Paris had reached no less a figure than a million and a half. After the explosion of the System, its artificial expansion naturally came to an end. By the middle of the century the highest estimate of the population does not make it much more

also Leibnitz, Voltaire, Diderot, Lessing, Mendelssohn, Wieland, and Herder, drew the strongest nourishment from him." (Hettner, *Literaturgeschichte des 18ten Jahrhunderts: 1er Theil*, 188.) See also Lange's *Gesch. des Materialismus*, i. 306, &c. An excellent account of Shaftesbury is given by Mr. Leslie Stephen, in his *Essays on Free-thinking and Plain-speaking*.

[1] i. xlvi.

than eight hundred thousand.[1] This, unlike the socially unwholesome and monstrous agglomerations of Paris or London in our own time, was a population over which police supervision might be made tolerably effective. It was more like a very large provincial town. Again, the inhabitants were marked off into groups or worlds with a definiteness that is now no longer possible. One-fifth of the population, for instance, consisted of domestic servants.[2] There were between twenty-eight and thirty thousand professional beggars.[3] The legal circle was large, and was deeply engrossed by its own interests and troubles. The world of authorship, though extremely noisy and profoundly important, still made only a small group. One effect of a censorship is to produce much gossip and whispering about suspected productions before they see the light, and these whispers let the police into as many secrets as they choose to know.

In Diderot's case, his unsuspecting good-nature to all comers made his affairs accessible enough. His house was the resort of all the starving hacks in Paris, and he has left us more than one graphic picture of the literary drudge of that time. He writes, for instance,

[1] Jobez, *France sous Louis XV.*, ii. 373. There were in 1725, 24,000 houses, 20,000 carriages, and 120,000 horses. (Martin's *Hist. de France*, xv. 116).

[2] The records of Paris in this century contain more than one illustration of the turbulence of this odious army of lackeys. Barbier, i. 118. For the way in which their insolence was fostered, see Saint-Simon, xii. 354, &c. The number of lackeys retained seems to have been extraordinarily great in proportion to the total of annual expenditure, and this is a curious point in the manners of the time. See Voltaire, *Dict. Phil.*, § v. Économie Domestique (liv. 182).

[3] Duclos, *Mém. secrets sur le Règne de Louis XV.*, iii. 306.

about a poor devil to whom he had given a manuscript to copy. 'The time for which he had promised it to me expired, and as my man did not appear, I became uneasy, and started in search of him. I found him in a hole about as big as my fist, almost pitch dark, without the smallest scrap of curtain or hanging to cover the nakedness of his walls, a couple of straw-bottomed chairs, a truckle-bed with a quilt riddled by the moths, a box in the corner of the chimney and rags of every sort stuck upon it, a small tin lamp to which a bottle served as support; and on a shelf some dozen first-rate books. I sat talking there for three-quarters of an hour. My man was as bare as a worm, lean, black, dry, but perfectly serene. He said nothing, but munched his crust of bread with good appetite, and bestowed a caress from time to time on his beloved on the miserable bedstead that took up two-thirds of his room. If I had never learnt before that happiness resides in the soul, my Epictetus of Hyacinth Street would have taught it me right thoroughly.'[1]

The history of one of these ragged clients is to our point. 'Among those,' he wrote to Madame Voland,[2] 'whom chance and misery sent to my address was one Glénat, who knew mathematics, wrote a good hand, and was in want of bread. I did all I could to extricate him from his embarrassments. I went begging for customers for him on every side. If he came at meal-times I would not let him go; if he lacked shoes, I gave him them; now and then I slipped a shilling

[1] *Œuv.*, xix. 91. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 130.

into his hand as well. He had the air of the worthiest man in the world, and he even bore his neediness with a certain gaiety that used to amuse me. I was fond of chatting with him; he seemed to set little store by fortune, fame, and most of the other things that charm or dazzle us in life. Seven or eight days ago Damilaville wrote to me to send this man to him, for one of his friends who had a manuscript for him to copy. I send him; the manuscript is entrusted to him—a work on religion and government. I do not know how it came about, but that manuscript is now in the hands of the lieutenant of police. Damilaville gives me word of this. I hasten to my friend Glénat, to warn him to count no more upon me. "And why am I not to count upon you?" "Because you are a marked man. The police have their eyes upon you, and 'tis impossible to send work to you." "But, my dear sir, there's no risk, so long as you entrust nothing reprehensible to my hands. The police only come here when they scent game. I cannot tell how they do it, but they are never mistaken." "Ah, well, I at any rate know how it is, and you have let me see much more in the matter than I ever expected to learn from you," and with that I turn my back on my rascal.' Diderot having occasion to visit the lieutenant of police, introduced the matter, and could not withhold an energetic remonstrance against such an odious abuse of a man's kindness of heart, as the introduction of spies to his fireside. M. de Sartine laughed and Diderot took his leave, vowing that all the wretches who should come

to him for the future, with cuffs dirty and torn, with holes in their stockings and holes in their shoes, with hair all unkempt, in shaggy overcoats with many rents, or scanty black suits with starting seams, with all the tones and looks of distressed worth, would henceforth seem to him no better than police emissaries and scoundrels set to spy on him. The vow, we may be sure, was soon forgotten, but the story shows how seriously in one respect the man of letters in France was worse off than his brother in England.

The world would have suffered no irreparable loss if the police had thrown the Sceptic's Walk into the fire. It is an allegory designed to contrast the life of religion, the life of philosophy, and the life of sensual pleasure. Of all forms of composition, an allegory most depends for its success upon the rapidity of the writer's eye for new felicities. Accuracy, verisimilitude, sustention, count for nothing in comparison with imaginative adroitness and variety. Bunyan had such an eye, and so, with infinitely more vivacity, had Voltaire. Diderot had not the deep sincerity or realism of conviction of the one; nor had he the inimitable power of throwing himself into a fancy, that was possessed by the other. He was the least agile, the least felicitous, the least ready, of composers. His allegory of the avenue of thorns, the avenue of chestnut-trees, and the avenue of flowers, is, as an allegory, unskilful, obvious, poor, and not any more amusing than if its matter had been set forth without any attempt at fanciful decoration. The blinded saints among the thorns, and the voluptuous

sinners among the flowers, are rather mechanical figures. The translation into the dialect required by the allegorical situation, of a sceptic's aversion for gross superstition on the one hand, and for gross hedonism on the other, is forced and wooden. The most interesting of the three sections is the second, containing a discussion in which the respective parts are taken by a deist, a pantheist, a subjective idealist, a sceptic, and an atheist. The allegory falls into the background, and we have a plain statement of some of the objections that may be made by the sceptical atheist both to revelation and to natural religion. A starry sky calls forth the usual glorification of the maker of so much beauty. 'That is all imagination,' rejoins the atheist. 'It is mere presumption. We have before us an unknown machine, on which certain observations have been made. Ignorant people who have only examined a single wheel of it, of which they hardly know more than a tooth or two, form conjectures upon the way in which their cogs fit in with a hundred thousand other wheels. And then to finish like artisans, they label the work with the name of its author.'

The defender justifies this by the argument from a repeater-watch, of which Paley and others have made so much use. We at once ascribe the structure and movement of a repeater-watch to intelligent creation. 'No—things are not equal,' says the atheist. 'You are comparing a finished work, whose origin and manufacture we know, to an infinite piece of complexity, whose beginnings, whose present condition, and whose end are

all alike unknown, and about whose author you have nothing better than guesses.'

But does not its structure announce an author? 'No; you do not see who nor what he is. Who told you that the order you admire here belies itself nowhere else? Are you allowed to conclude from a point in space to infinite space? You pile a vast piece of ground with earth-heaps thrown here or there by chance, but among which the worm and the ant find convenient dwelling-places enough. What would you think of these insects, if, reasoning after your fashion, they fell into raptures over the intelligence of the gardener who had arranged all these materials so delightfully for their convenience?'[1]

In this rudimentary form the chief speaker presses some of the objections to optimistic deism from the point of view of the fixed limitations, the inevitable relativity, of human knowledge. This kind of objection had been more pithily expressed by Pascal long before, in the famous article of his Thoughts, on the difficulty of demonstrating the existence of a deity by light of nature.[2] Diderot's argument does not extend to dogmatic denial. It only shows that the deist is exposed to an attack from the same sceptical armoury from which he had drawn his own weapons for attacking revelation. It is impossible to tell how far Diderot went at this moment.

[1] *Prom. du Sceptique.* *Œuv.*, i. 229.

[2] "If there is a God, he is infinitely incomprehensible, since, being without parts or limits, he has no relation to us: we are therefore incapable of knowing what he is, or if he is. That being so, who shall venture to undertake the solution of the question? Not we, at any rate, who have no relation to him."—*Pensées*, II. iii. 1.

The trenchancy with which his atheist urges his reasoning proves that the writer was fully alive to its force. On the other hand, the atheist is left in the midst of a catastrophe. On his return home he finds his children murdered, his house pillaged, and his wife carried off. And we are told that he could not complain on his own principles. If the absence of witnesses allowed the robber to commit his crime with impunity, why should he not? Again, there is a passage in which the writer seems to be speaking his own opinions. An interlocutor maintains the importance of keeping the people in bondage to certain prejudices. 'What prejudices? If a man once admits the existence of a God, the reality of moral good and evil, the immortality of the soul, future rewards and punishments, what need has he of prejudices? Supposing him initiated in all the mysteries of transubstantiation, consubstantiation, the Trinity, hypostatical union, predestination, incarnation, and the rest, will he be any the better citizen?'[1]

In truth, Diderot's mind was at this time floating in an atmosphere of rationalistic negation, and the moral of his piece, as he hints, points first to the extravagance of Catholicism, next to the vanity of the pleasures of the world, and lastly, to the unfathomable uncertainty of philosophy. Still, we may discern a significant leaning towards the theory of the eternity of matter, which has arranged itself and assumed variety of form by virtue of its inherent quality of motion.[2]

[1] P. 182. [2] P. 223.

It is a characteristic and displeasing mark of the time that Diderot in the midst of these serious speculations, should have set himself (1748) to the composition of a story in the kind which the author of the *Sofa* had made highly popular. The mechanism of this deplorable piece is more grossly disgusting—I mean æsthetically, not morally—than anything to be found elsewhere in the too voluminous library of impure literature. The idea would seem to have been borrowed from one of the old Fabliaux.[1] But what is tolerable in the quaint and naïf verse of the twelfth or thirteenth century, becomes shocking when deliberately rendered by a grave man into bald unblushing prose of the eighteenth. The humour, the rich sparkle, the wit, the merry *gaillardise*, have all vanished; we are left with the vapid dregs of an obscene anachronism. Mr. Carlyle, who knows how to be manly in these matters, and affects none of the hypocritical airs of our conventional criticism, yet has not more energetically than truly pronounced this 'the beastliest of all past, present, or future dull novels.' As 'the next mortal creature, even a Reviewer, again compelled to glance into that book,' I have felt the propriety of our humourist's injunction to such an one, 'to bathe himself in running water, put on change of raiment, and be unclean until the even.' Diderot himself, as might have been expected, soon had the grace to repent him of this shameful book,

[1] Barbazan's *Fabliaux et Contes*, iii. 409 (ed. 1808). The learned Barbazan's first edition was published in 1756, and so Diderot may well have heard some of the contents of the work then in progress.

and could never hear it mentioned without a very lively embarrassment.[1]

As I have said before,[2] it was such books as this, as Crébillon's novels, as Duclos's Confessions du Comte X., and the dissoluteness of manners indicated by them, which invested Rousseau's New Heloïsa (1761) with its delightful and irresistible fascination. Having pointed out elsewhere the significance of the licentiousness from which the philosophic party did not escape untainted,[3] I need not here do more than make two short remarks. First, the corruption which had seized the court after the death of Lewis XIV. in the course of a few years had reached the middle class in the town. The loosening of social fibre, caused by the insensate speculation at the time of Law, no doubt furthered the spread of demoralisation. Second, the reaction against the Church involved among its other elements a passionate contempt for all asceticism. This happened to fall in with the general relaxation of morals that followed Lewis's gloomy rigour. Consequently even men of pure life, like Condorcet, carried the theoretical protest against asceticism so far as to vindicate the practical immorality of the time. This is one of those enormous drawbacks that people seldom take into account when they are enumerating the blessings of superstition. Mediæval superstition had produced some advantages, but now came the set-off. Durable morality had been associated with a transitory religious faith. The faith

[1] Naigeon. [2] In my *Rousseau*, ii. 24-6.
[3] *Voltaire*, pp. 144-7. (2nd ed.)

fell into intellectual discredit, and sexual morality shared its decline for a short season. This must always be the natural consequence of building sound ethics on the shifting sands and rotting foundations of theology.

Such literature as these tales of Diderot's, was the mirror both of the ordinary practical sentiment and the philosophic theory. A nation pays dearly for one of these outbreaks, when they happen to stamp themselves in a literary form that endures. There are those who hold that Louvet's Faublas is to this day a powerful agent in the depravation of the youth of France. Diderot, however, had not the most characteristic virtues of French writing; he was no master in the art of the naïf, nor in delicate malice, nor in sprightly cynicism. His book, consequently, has not lived, and we need not waste more words upon it. *Chaque esprit a sa lie*, wrote one who for a while had sat at Diderot's feet;[1] and we may dismiss this tale as the lees of Diderot's strong, careless, sensualized understanding. He was afterwards the author of a work, La Religieuse, on which the superficial critic may easily pour out the vials of affected wrath. There, however, he was executing a profound pathological study in a serious spirit. If the subject is horrible, we have to blame the composition of human character, or the mischievousness of a human institution. La Religieuse is no continuation of the vein of defilement which began and ended with the story of 1748—a story which is one among so many illustrations of Guizot's saying about the

[1] Joubert.

eighteenth century, that it was the most tempting and seductive of all centuries, for it promised full satisfaction at once to all the greatnesses of humanity and to all its weaknesses. Hettner quotes a passage from the minor writings of Niebuhr, in which that historian compares Diderot with Petronius, as having both of them been honest and well-intentioned men, who in shameless times were carried towards cynicism by their deep contempt for the prevailing vice. 'If Diderot were alive now,' says Niebuhr, 'and if Petronius had only lived in the fourth instead of the third century, then the painting of obscenity would have been odious to them, and the inducement to it infinitely smaller.'[1] There is no trace in Diderot of this deep contempt for the viciousness of his time. All that can be said is that he did not escape it in his earlier years, in spite of the natural wholesomeness and rectitude of his character.

It is worthy of remark that the dissoluteness of the middle portion of the century was not associated with the cynical and contemptuous view about women that usually goes with relaxed morality. There was a more or less distinct consciousness of a truth which has ever since grown into clearer prominence with the advance of thought since the Revolution. It is that the sphere and destiny of women are among the three or four foremost questions in social improvement. This is now perceived on all sides, profound as are the differences of opinion upon the proper solution of the problem. A hundred years ago this perception was

[1] Hettner, *Literaturgeschichte des 18ten Jahrhunderts*, ii. 301.

vague and indefinite, but there was an unmistakable apprehension that the Catholic ideal of womanhood was no more adequate to the facts of life, than Catholic views about science, or property, or labour, or political order and authority.

Diderot has left some curious and striking reflections upon the fate and character of women. He gives no signs of feeling after social reorganization; he only speaks as one brooding in uneasy meditation over a very mournful perplexity. There is no sentimentalizing, after the fashion of Jean Jacques. He does not neglect the plain physical facts, about which it is so difficult in an age of morbid reserve to speak with freedom, yet about which it is fatal to be silent. He indulged in none of those mischievous flatteries of women which satisfy narrow observers or coxcombs or the uxorious. 'Never forget,' he said, 'that for lack of reflection and principles, nothing penetrates down to a certain profoundness of conviction in the understanding of women. The ideas of justice, virtue, vice, goodness, badness, float on the surface of their souls. They have preserved self-love and personal interest with all the energy of nature. Although more civilised than we are outwardly, they have remained true savages inwardly. . . . It is in the passion of love, the access of jealousy, the transports of maternal tenderness, the instants of superstition, the way in which they show epidemic and popular notions, that women amaze us; fair as the seraphin of Klopstock, terrible as the fiends of Milton. . . . The distractions

of a busy and contentious life break up our passions. A woman, on the contrary, broods over her passions; they are a fixed point on which her idleness or the frivolity of her duties holds her attention fast. . . . Impenetrable in dissimulation, cruel in vengeance, tenacious in their designs, without scruples about the means of success, animated by a deep and secret hatred against the despotism of man, it seems as if there were among them a sort of league, such as exists among the priests of all nations. . . . The symbol of women in general is that of the Apocalypse, on the front of which is inscribed, *Mystery*. . . . If we have more reason than women have, they have far more instinct than we have.'[1] All this was said in no bitterness, but in the spirit of the strong observer.

Cynical bitterness is as misplaced as frivolous adulation. Diderot had a deep pity for women. Their physical weaknesses moved him to compassion. To these are added the burden of their maternal function, and the burden of unequal laws. 'The moment which shall deliver the girl from subjection to her parents is come; her imagination opens to a future thronged by chimeras; her heart swims in secret delight. Rejoice while thou canst, luckless creature! Time would have weakened the tyranny thou hast left; time will strengthen the tyranny that awaits thee. They choose a husband for her. She becomes a mother. It is in anguish, at the peril of their lives, at the cost of their charms, often to the damage of their health, that they

[1] *Œuv.*, ii. 260, etc.

give birth to their little ones. The organs that mark their sex are subject to two incurable maladies. There is, perhaps, no joy comparable to that of the mother as she looks on her first-born; but the moment is dearly bought. Time advances, beauty passes; there come the years of neglect, of spleen, of weariness. 'Tis in pain that Nature disposes them for maternity; in pain and illness, dangerous and prolonged, she brings maternity to its close. What is a woman after that? Neglected by her husband, left by her children, a nullity in society, then piety becomes her one and last resource. In nearly every part of the world, the cruelty of the civil laws is added against women to the cruelty of Nature. They have been treated like weak-minded children. There is no sort of vexation which, among civilised peoples, man cannot inflict upon woman with impunity.' [1]

The thought went no further, in Diderot's mind, than this pathetic ejaculation. He left it to the next generation, to Condorcet and others, to attack the problem practically; effectively to assert the true theory that we must look to social emancipation in women, and moral discipline in men, to redress the

[1] *Œuv.*, ii. 258–9. *De l'Essai sur les]Femmes, par Thomas.* See Grimm's *Corr. Lit.* vii. 451, where the book is disparaged; and viii. 1, where Diderot's view of it is given. Thomas (1732–1785) belonged to the philosophical party, but not to the militant section of it. He was a serious and orderly person in his life, and enjoyed the closest friendship with Madame Necker. His enthusiasm for virtue, justice, and freedom, expressed with much magniloquence, made him an idol in the respectable circle which Madame Necker gathered round her. He has been justly, though perhaps harshly, described as a "valetudinarian Grandison." (Albert's *Lit. Française au 18ième Siècle*, p. 423.)

physical disadvantages. Meanwhile Diderot deserves credit for treating the position and character of women in a civilised society with a sense of reality; and for throwing aside the faded gallantries of poetic and literary convention, that screen a broad and dolorous gulf.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE NEW PHILOSOPHY.

IT is a common prejudice to treat Voltaire as if he had done nothing save write the Pucelle and mock at Habakkuk. Every serious and instructed student knows better. Voltaire's popularisation of the philosophy of Newton (1738) was a stimulus of the greatest importance to new thought in France. In a chapter of this work he had explained with his usual matchless terseness and lucidity Berkeley's theory of vision. The principle of this theory is, as every one knows, that figures, magnitudes, situations, distances, are not sensations but inferences; they are not the immediate revelations of sight, but the products of association and intellectual construction; they are not directly judged by vision, but by imagination and experience. If this be so, neither situation, nor distance, nor magnitude, nor figure, would be at once discerned by one born blind, supposing him suddenly to receive sight. Voltaire then describes the results of the operation performed by Cheselden (1728) on a lad who had been blind from his birth. This experiment was believed to confirm all that Locke and

Berkeley had foreseen, for it was long before the patient could distinguish objects by size, distance, or shape.[1] Condillac had renewed the interest which Voltaire had first kindled in the subject, by referring to Cheselden's experiment in his first work, which was published in 1746.[2]

It happened that in 1748 Réaumur couched the eyes of a girl who had been born blind. Diderot sought to be admitted to the operation, but the favour was denied him, and he expressed his resentment in terms which, as we shall see, cost him very dear. As he could not witness the experiment, he began to meditate upon the subject, and the result was the *Letter on the Blind for the Use of those who See*, published in 1749,—the date, it may be observed in passing, of another very important work in the development of materialistic speculation, David Hartley's *Observations on man, his frame, his duty, and his expectations*. Diderot's real disappointment at not being admitted to the operation was slight. In a vigorous passage he shows the difficulties in the way of conducting such an experiment under the conditions necessary to make it conclusive. To prepare the born-blind to answer philosophical interrogatories truly, and then to put these interrogatories rightly, would have

[1] *Elémens de la Philosophie de Newton*, Pt. II., Ch. vii. Berkeley himself only refers once to Cheselden's case: *Theory of Vision vindicated*, § 71. Professor Fraser, in his important edition of Berkeley's works (i. 444), reproduces from the *Philosophical Transactions* the original account of the operation, which is unfortunately much less clear and definite than Voltaire's emphasised version would make it, though its purport is distinct enough.

[2] *Essai sur l'Origine des Connaissances humaines*, I., § 6.

been a feat, he declares, not unworthy of the united talents of Newton, Descartes, Locke, and Leibnitz. Unless the patient were placed in such conditions as this, Diderot thinks there would be more profit in questioning a blind person of good sense, than in the answers of an uneducated person receiving sight for the first time under abnormal and bewildering circumstances.[1] In this he was undoubtedly right. If the experiment could be prepared under the delicate conditions proper to make it demonstrative evidence, it would be final. But the experiment had certainly not been so prepared in his time, and probably never will be.[2]

Read in the light of the rich and elaborate speculative literature which England is producing in our own day, Diderot's once famous Letter on the Blind seems both crude and loose in its thinking. Yet considering the state of philosophy in France at the time of its appearance, we are struck by the acuteness, the good sense, and the originality of many of its positions. It was the first effective introduction into France of these great and fundamental principles; that all knowledge is relative to our intelligence, that thought is not the measure of existence, nor the conceivableness of a proposition the test of its truth, and that our experience

[1] *Let. sur les Aveugles*, 323—4. Condorcet attaches a higher value to Cheselden's operation; (*Eur.*, II., 121.

[2] Dr. McCosh (*Exam. of J. S. Mill's Philosophy*, p. 163) quotes what seems to be the best reported case, by a Dr. Franz, of Leipzig; and Prof. Fraser, in the appendix to Berkeley (*loc. cit.*), quotes another good case by Mr. Nunnely. See also Mill's *Exam. of Hamilton*, p. 288 (3rd ed.).

is not the limit to the possibilities of things. That is an impatient criticism which dismisses the French philosophers with some light word as radically shallow and impotent. Diderot grasped the doctrine of Relativity in some of the most important and far-reaching of all its bearings. The fact that he and his allies used the doctrine as a weapon of combat against the standing organization, is exactly what makes their history worth writing about. The standing organization was the antagonistic doctrine incarnate. It made anthropomorphism and the absolute the very base and spring alike of individual and of social life. No growth was possible until this speculative base had been transformed. Hence the profound significance of what looks like a mere discussion of one of the minor problems of metaphysics. Diderot was not the first to discover Relativity, nor did he establish it; but it was he who introduced it into the literature of his country at the moment when circumstances were ripe for it.

Condillac, as we have said, had published his first work, the Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge, three years before (1746). This was a simple and undeveloped rendering of the doctrine of Locke, that the ultimate source of our notions lies in impressions made upon the senses, shaped and combined by reflection. It was not until 1754 that Condillac published his more celebrated Treatise on the Sensations, in which he advanced a stride beyond Locke, and instead of tracing our notions to the double source of sensation

and reflection, maintained that reflection itself is nothing but sensation 'differently transformed.' In the first book, again, he had disputed Berkeley's theory of vision: in the second, he gave a reasoned adhesion to it. Now Diderot and Condillac had first been brought together by Rousseau, when all three were needy wanderers about the streets of Paris. They used to dine together once a week at a tavern, and it was Diderot who persuaded a bookseller to give Condillac a hundred crowns for his first manuscript. 'The Paris booksellers,' says Rousseau, 'are very arrogant and harsh to beginners; and metaphysics, then extremely little in fashion, did not offer a very particularly attractive subject.'[1] The constant intercourse between Diderot and Condillac in the interval between the two works of the great apostle of Sensationalism, may well account for the remarkable development in doctrine. This is one of the many examples of the share of Diderot's energetic and stimulating intelligence, in directing and nourishing the movement of the time, its errors and precipitancies included. On the other hand, the share of Condillac in providing a text for Diderot's first considerable performance is equally evident.

The Letter on the Blind is an inquiry how far a modification of the five senses, such as the congenital absence of one of them, would involve a corresponding modification of the ordinary notions acquired by men who are normally endowed in their capacity for sensa-

[1] *Confessions*, II., vii.

tion. It considers the Intellect, in a case where it is deprived of one of the senses. The writer opens with an account of a visit made by himself and some friends to a man born blind at Puisaux, a place seventy miles from Paris. They asked him in what way he thought of the eyes. 'They are an organ on which the air produces the same effect as my stick upon my hand.' A mirror he described 'as a machine which sets things in relief away from themselves, if they are properly placed in relation to it.' This conception had formed itself in his mind in the following way. The blind man only knows objects by touch. He is aware, on the testimony of others, that we know objects by sight as he knows them by touch; he can form no other notion. He is aware, again, that a man cannot see his own face, though he can touch it. Sight, then, he concludes, is a sort of touch, which only extends to objects different from our own visage, and remote from us. Now touch only conveys to him the idea of relief. A mirror, therefore, must be a machine which sets us in relief out of ourselves. How many philosophers, cries Diderot, have employed less subtlety to reach notions just as untrue.

The born-blind had a memory for sound in a surprising degree, and countenances do not present more diversity to us than he observed in voices. The voice has for such persons an infinite number of delicate shades that escape us, because we have not the same reason for attention as the blind have. The help that

our senses lend to one another, is an obstacle to their perfection.

The blind man said he should have been tempted to regard persons endowed with sight as superior intelligences, if he had not found out a hundred times how. inferior we are in other respects. How do we know—Diderot reflects upon this—that all the animals do not reason in the same way, and look upon themselves as our equals or superiors, notwithstanding our more complex and efficient intelligence? They may accord to us a reason with which we should still have much need of their instinct, while they claim to be endowed with an instinct which enables them to do very well without our reason.

When asked whether he should be glad to have sight, the born-blind replied that, apart from curiosity, he would be just as well pleased to have long arms: his hands would tell him what is going on in the moon better than our eyes or telescopes; and the eyes cease to see earlier than the hands lose the sense of touch. It would therefore be just as good to perfect in him the organ that he had, as to confer upon him another which he had not. This is untrue. No conceivable perfection of touch would reveal phenomena of light, and the longest arms must leave those phenomena undisclosed.

After recounting various other peculiarities of thought, Diderot notices that the blind man attaches slight importance to the sense of shame. He would hardly understand the utility of clothes, for instance.

except as a protection against cold. He frankly told his philosophizing visitors that he could not see why one part of the body should be covered rather than another. 'I have never doubted,' says Diderot, 'that the state of our organs and senses has much influence both on our metaphysics and our morality.' This, I may observe, does not in the least show that in a society of human beings, not blind but endowed with vision, the sense of physical shame is a mere prejudice of which philosophy will rid us. The fact that a blind man discerns no ill in nakedness, has no bearing on the value or naturalness of shame among people with eyes. And moreover, the fact that delicacy or shame is not a universal human impulse, but is established, and its scope defined, by a varying etiquette, does not in the least affect the utility or wisdom of such an artificial establishment and definition. The grounds of delicacy, though connected with the senses, are fixed by considerations that spring from the social reason. It seems to be true, as Diderot says, that the born-blind are at first without physical delicacy; because delicacy has its root in the consciousness that we are observed, while the born-blind are not conscious that they are observed. It is found that one of the most important parts of their education is to impress this knowledge upon them.[1] But the artificiality of a moral acquisition is obviously no test of its worth, nor of the reasons for preserving it. Diderot exclaims, 'Ah, madam, how

[1] Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Men and Animals*, c. xiii., p. 312, and also pp. 335—7. This fact, so far as it goes, seems to make against the theory of transmitted sentiments.

different is the morality of a blind man from ours; and how the morality of the deaf would differ from that of the blind; and if a being should have a sense more than we have, how wofully imperfect would he find our morality!' This is plainly a crude and erroneous way of illustrating the important truth of the strict relativity of ethical standards and maxims. Diderot speaks as if they were relative simply and solely to our five wits, and would vary with them only. Everybody now has learnt that morality depends not merely on the five wits, but on the mental constitution within, and on the social conditions without. It is to these, rather than to the number of our senses, that moral ideas are relative.

Passing over various other remarks, we come to those pages in the Letter which apply the principle of relativity to the master-conception of God. Diderot's argument on this point naturally drew keener attention than the more disinterestedly scientific parts of his contribution. People were not strongly agitated by the question whether a blind man who had learnt to distinguish a sphere from a cube by touch, would instantly identify each of them if he received sight.[1] The

[1] Locke answered that the man would not distinguish the cube from the sphere, until he had identified by actual touch the source of his former tactual impression with the object making a given visual impression. Condillac, while making just objections to the terms in which Molyneux propounded the question, answered it differently from Locke. Diderot expresses his own opinion thus:—'I think that when the eyes of the born-blind are open for the first time to the light, he will perceive nothing at all; that some time will be necessary for his eye to make experiments for itself; but that it will make these experiments itself, and in its own way, and without the help of touch.' This is in harmony with the modern doctrine, that there is an inherited aptitude of structure (in the eye, for instance), but that experience is an essential condition to the development and perfecting of this aptitude.

question whether a blind man has as good reasons for believing in the existence of a God as a man with sight can find, was of more vivid interest. As a matter of fact Diderot's treatment of the narrower question (pp. 324, etc.) is more closely coherent than his treatment of the wider one, for the simple reason that the special limitation of experience in the born-blind cannot fairly be made to yield any decisive evidence on the great, the insoluble enigma.

Here, as in the other part of his essay, Diderot followed the method of interrogating the blind themselves. In this instance, he turned to the most extraordinary example in history, of intellectual mastery and scientific penetration in one who practically belonged to the class of the born-blind; and this too in dealing with subjects where sight might be thought most indispensable. From 1711 to 1739 one of the professors of mathematics at Cambridge was Nicholas Saunderson, who had lost his sight before he was twelve months old. He was a man of striking mental vigour, an original and efficient teacher, and the author of a book upon algebra which was considered meritorious in its day. His knowledge of optics was highly remarkable. He had distinct ideas of perspective, of the projections of the sphere, and of the forms assumed by plane or solid figures in certain positions. For performing computations he devised a machine of great ingenuity, which also served the purpose, with certain modifications, of representing geometrical diagrams. In religion he was a sceptic or something more, and in

his last hours Diderot supposes him to have engaged in a discussion with a minister of religion, upon the arguments for the existence of a deity drawn from final causes. This discussion Diderot professes to reproduce, and he makes Saunderson discourse with much eloquence and some pathos.

By one of those mystifications which make the French polemical literature of the eighteenth century the despair of bibliographers, Diderot cites as his authority a *Life of Saunderson*, by Dr. Inchlif. He sets forth the title with great circumstantiality, but no such book exists or ever did exist. The Royal Society of London, however, took the jest of fathering atheism on one of its members in bad part, and Diderot was systematically excluded from the honour of admission to that learned body, as he was excluded all his life from the French Academy.[1]

The reasoning which Diderot puts into the professor's mouth is at first a fervid enlargement of the text that the argument drawn from the wonders of nature is very weak evidence for blind men. Our power of creating new objects, so to speak, by means of a little mirror, is far more incomprehensible to them, than the stars which they have been condemned never to behold. The luminous ball that moves from east to west through the heavens is a less astonishing thing to them, than the fire on the hearth which they can lessen or augment at pleasure. 'Why talk to me,'

[1] A very intelligent English translation of the *Letter on the Blind* was published in 1773. For some reason or other Diderot is described on the title page as Phy-ician to His most Christian Majesty.

says Saunderson, 'of all that fine spectacle which has never been made for me? I have been condemned to pass my life in darkness; and you cite marvels that I cannot understand, and that are only evidence for you and for those who see as you do. If you want me to believe in God you must make me touch him.' The minister replied that the sense of touch ought to be enough to reveal the divinity to him in the admirable mechanism of his organs. To this, Saunderson:—'I repeat, all that is not as fine for me as it is for you. But the animal mechanism, even were it as perfect as you pretend, and as I daresay it is—what has it in common with a being of sovereign intelligence? If it fills you with astonishment, that is perhaps because you are in the habit of treating as a prodigy anything that strikes you as being beyond your own strength. I have been myself so often an object of admiration for you, that I have a poor opinion of what surprises you. I have attracted people from all parts of England, who could not conceive by what means I could work at geometry. Well, you must agree that such persons had not very exact notions about the possibility of things. Is a phenomenon in our notions beyond the power of man? Then we instantly say—*'Tis the handiwork of a God.* Nothing short of that can content our vanity. Why can we not contrive to throw into our talk less pride and more philosophy? If nature offers us some knot that is hard to untie, let us leave it for what it is; do not let us employ for cutting it the hand of a Being, who then immediately

becomes in turn a new knot for us, and a knot harder to untie than the first. An Indian tells you that our globe is suspended in the air on the back of an elephant. And the elephant? It stands on a tortoise. And the tortoise? what sustains that? . . . You pity the Indian: and yet one might very well say to you as to him—Mr. Holmes, my good friend, confess your ignorance, and spare me elephant and tortoise.'[1]

The minister very naturally then falls back upon good authority, and asks Saunderson to take the word of Newton, Clarke, and Leibnitz. The blind man answers that though the actual state of the universe may be the illustration of a marvellous and admirable order, still Newton, Clarke, and Leibnitz must leave him freedom of opinion as to its earlier states. And then he foreshadows in a really singular and remarkable way that theory which is believed to be the great triumph of scientific discovery, and which is certainly the great stimulus to speculation, in our own time. As to anterior states 'you have no witnesses to confront with me, and your eyes give you no help. Imagine, if you choose, that the order which strikes you so profoundly has subsisted from the beginning. But leave me free to think that it has done no such thing, and that if we went back to the birth of things and scenes, and perceived matter in motion and chaos slowly disentangling itself, we should come across a whole multitude of shapeless creatures, instead of a very few creatures highly organized. If I have no objection to

[1] i. 308.

make to what you say about the present condition of things, I may at least question you as to their past condition. I may at least ask of you, for example, who told you—you and Leibnitz and Clarke and Newton—that in the first instances of the formation of animals, some were not without heads and others without feet? I may maintain that these had no stomachs, and those no intestines; that some to whom a stomach, a palate, and teeth seemed to promise permanence, came to an end through some fault of heart or lungs; that the monsters annihilated one another in succession, that all the faulty (*vicieuses*) combinations of matter disappeared, and that *those only survived whose mechanism implied no important mis-adaptation* (contradiction), *and who had the power of supporting and perpetuating themselves.*

'On this hypothesis, if the first man had happened to have his larynx closed, or had not found suitable food, or had been defective in the parts of generation, or had failed to find a mate, then what would have become of the human race? It would have been still enfolded in the general depuration of the universe; and that arrogant being who calls himself Man, dissolved and scattered among the molecules of matter, would perhaps have remained for all time hidden in the number of mere possibilities.

'If shapeless creatures had never existed, you would not fail to insist that none will ever appear, and that I am throwing myself headlong into chimerical hypotheses. But the order is not even now

so perfect, but that monstrous products appear from time to time.'[1]

We have here a distinct enough conception, though in an exceedingly undigested shape, first of incessant Variability in organisms as an actual circumstance, which we may see exemplified in its extreme form in the monstrous deviations of structure that occur from time to time before our own eyes; second, of Adaptation to environment as the determining condition of Survival among the forms that present themselves. Even as a bald and unsustained guess, this was an effective side-blow at the doctrine of final causes,—a doctrine, as has been often remarked, which does not survive, in any given set of phenomena, the reduction of these phenomena to terms of matter and motion.

'I conjecture then,' continues Saunderson, enlarging the idea of the possibilities of matter and motion, 'that in the beginning when matter in fermentation gradually brought our universe bursting into being, blind creatures like myself were very common. But why should I not believe of worlds what I believe of animals? How many worlds, mutilated and imperfect, were peradventure dispersed, then re-formed, and are again dispersing at each moment of time in those far-off spaces which I cannot touch and you cannot behold, but where motion combines and will continue to combine masses of matter, until they have chanced on some arrangement in which they may finally persevere! O philosophers, transport

[1] Pp. 309—310.

yourselves with me on to the confines of the universe, beyond the point where I feel, and you see, organized beings; gaze over that new ocean, and seek across its lawless, aimless, heavings some vestiges of that intelligent Being whose wisdom strikes you with such wonder here!

'What is this world? A complex whole, subject to endless revolutions. All these revolutions show a continual tendency to destruction; a swift succession of beings who follow one another, press forward, and vanish; a fleeting symmetry; the order of a moment. I reproached you just now with estimating the perfection of things by your own capacity; and I might accuse you here of measuring its duration by the length of your own days. You judge of the continuous existence of the world, as an ephemeral insect might judge of yours. The world is eternal for you, as you are eternal to the being that lives but for one instant. Yet the insect is the more reasonable of the two. For what a prodigious succession of ephemeral generations attests your eternity! What an immeasurable tradition! Yet shall we all pass away, without the possibility of assigning either the real extension that we filled in space, or the precise time that we shall have endured. Time, matter, space,—all it may be, are no more than a point.'[1]

Diderot sent a copy of his work to Voltaire. The poet replied with his usual playful politeness, but

[1] P. 311.

declared his dissent from Saunderson, 'who denied God, because he happened to have been born blind.'[1] More pretentious, and infinitely less acute critics than Voltaire, have fixed on the same point in the argument and met it by the same answer; namely, that, blind as he was, Saunderson ought to have recognised an intelligent being who had provided him with so many substitutes for sight; he ought to have inferred a skilful demiurgus from those ordered relations in the universe, which Thought, independently of Vision, might well have disclosed to him. In truth, this is not the centre of the whole argument. When Saunderson implies that he could only admit a God on condition that he could touch him, he makes a single sense the channel of all possible ideas, and the arbiter of all reasoned combinations of ideas. This is absurd, and Diderot, as we have seen, rapidly passed away from that to the real strength of the position. All the rest of the contention against final causes would have come just as fitly from the lips of a man with vision, as from Saunderson. The hypothetical inference of a deity from the marvels of adaptation to be found in the universe is unjustified, among other reasons, because it ignores or leaves unexplained the marvels of mis-adaptation in the universe. It makes absolute through eternity a hypothesis which can at its best only be true relatively—not merely to the number of our senses, but—to a few partially chosen phenomena of our own little day. It explains a few striking facts;

[1] *Corr.*, June, 1749.

it leaves wholly unexplained a far greater number of equally striking facts, even if it be not directly contradicted by them. It is the invention of an imaginary agency to account for the scanty successes of creation, and an attribution to that agency of the kind of motives that might have animated a benevolent European living in the eighteenth century. It leaves wholly unaccounted for the prodigious host of monstrous or imperfect organisms, and the appalling law of merciless and incessant destruction.

To us this is the familiar discussion of the day. But let us return to the starting-point of this chapter. In France a hundred and twenty years ago it was the first opening of a decisive breach in the walls that had sheltered the men of western Europe against outer desolation for some fifteen centuries or more. The completeness of Catholicism as a self-containing system of life and thought is now harder for Protestants or Sceptics to realise, than any other fact in the whole history of human society. Catholicism was not only an institution, nor only a religious faith; it was also a philosophy and a systematized theory of the universe. The Church during its best age directed the moral relations of individual men, and attempted more or less successfully to humanise the relations of communities. It satisfied or stimulated the affections by its exaltation of the Virgin Mary as a supreme object of worship; it nourished the imagination on polytheistic legends of saints and martyrs; it stirred the religious emotions by touching and impressive rites; it sur-

rounded its members with emblems of a special and invincible protection. Catholicism, we have again and again to repeat, claimed to deal with life as a whole, and to leave no province of nature, no faculty of man, no need of intelligence or spirit, uncomprehended. But we must not forget that, though this prodigious system had its root in the affections and sympathies of human nature, it was also fenced round by a theory of metaphysic. It rested upon authority and tradition, but it also sought an expression in an intellectual philosophy of things. The essence of this philosophy was to make man the final cause of the universe. Its interpretation of the world was absolute; its conception of the Creator was absolute; its account of our intellectual impressions, of our moral rules, of our spiritual ideals, made them all absolute. Now Diderot, when he wrote the Letter on the Blind, perceived that mere rationalistic attacks upon the sacred books, upon the miracles, upon the moral types, of Catholicism, could only be partially effective for destruction, and could have no effect at all in replacing the old ways of thinking by others of more solid truth. The attack must begin in philosophy. The first fruitful process must consist in shifting the point of view, in enlarging the range of the facts to be considered, in pressing the relativity of our ideas, in freeing ourselves from the tyranny of anthropomorphism.

Hobbes's witty definition of the papacy as the ghost of the old Roman Empire sitting enthroned on the grave thereof, may tempt us to forget the all-important

truth that the basis of the power of the ghost was essentially different from that of the dissolved body. The Empire was a political organization, resting on military force. The Church was a social organization, made vital by a conviction. The greatest fact in the intellectual history of the eighteenth century is the decisive revolution that overtook that sustaining conviction. The movement and the men whom we are studying owe all their interest to the share that they had in this immense task. The central conception, that the universe was called into existence only to further its Creator's purpose towards man, became incredible. This absolute proposition was slowly displaced by notions of the limitation of human faculties and of the comparatively small portion of the whole cosmos or chaos, to which we have reason to believe that these faculties give us access. To substitute this relative point of view for the absolute, was the all-important preliminary to the effectual breaking up of the great Catholic construction.

What seems to careless observers a mere metaphysical dispute was in truth, and still is, the decisive quarter of the great battle between theology and a philosophy reconcilable with science. When the Catholic reaction set in, Joseph de Maistre, by far its acutest champion in the region of philosophy, at once made it his first business to attack the principle of relativity with all his force of dialectic, and to reinstate absolute modes of thinking, and the absolute quality of Catholic propositions about religion, know-

ledge, and government.[1] Yet neither he nor any one else on his side has ever effectively shaken the solid argument which Diderot fancifully illustrated in the following passage from his reply to Voltaire's letter of thanks for the opuscule:—'This marvellous order and these wondrous adaptations, what am I to think of them? That they are metaphysical entities only existing in your own mind. You cover a vast piece of ground with a mass of ruins falling hither or thither at hazard; amid these the worm and the ant find commodious shelter enough. What would you say of these insects if they were to take for real and final entities the relations of the places which they inhabit to their organization, and then fall into ecstasies over the beauty of their subterranean architecture, and the wonderfully superior intelligence of the gardener who arranges things so conveniently for them?'[2] This is the notion which Voltaire himself three years afterwards illustrated in the witty fancies of *Micromégas.* The little animalcule in the square cap, who makes the giant laugh in a Homeric manner by its inflated account of itself as the final cause of the universe, is the type of the philosophy on which Catholicism is based.

In the same letter Diderot avows his dissent—hypocritically, I find reason for suspecting—from Saunderson's conclusion. 'It is commonly in the night-time,' he says, 'that the mists arise which obscure in me the existence of God; the rising of the sun never fails

[1] See *Critical Miscellanies:* First Series.

[2] Diderot to Voltaire, 1749. *Œuv.* xix. 421. See above, p. 68.

to scatter them. But then the darkness is ever-enduring for the blind, and the sun only rises for those who see.' Diderot's denial of atheism seems more than suspicious, when one finds him taking so much pains to make out Saunderson's case for him; when he urges the argument following, for instance: —'If there had never existed any but material beings, there would never have been spiritual beings; for then the spiritual beings would either have given themselves existence, or else would have received it from the material beings. But if there had never existed any but spiritual beings, you will see that there would never have been material beings. Right philosophy only allows me to suppose in things what I can distinctly perceive in them. Now I perceive no other faculties distinctly in the mind except those of willing and thinking, and I no more conceive that thought and will can act on material beings or on nothing, than I can conceive material beings or nothing acting on spiritual beings.' And he winds up his letter thus:—'It is very important not to take hemlock for parsley; but not important at all to believe or to disbelieve in God. The world, said Montaigne, is a tennis-ball that he has given to philosophers to toss hither and thither; and I would say nearly as much of the Deity himself.'[1]

In concluding our account of this piece, we may mention that Diderot threw out a hint, which is a good illustration of the alert and practically helpful way in which his mind was always seeking new ideas. We

[1] *Ibid.*

have common signs, he said, appealing to the eye, namely written characters, and others appealing to the ear, namely articulate sounds; we have none appealing to touch. 'For want of such a language, communication is entirely broken between us and those who are born deaf, dumb, and blind. They grow; but they remain in a state of imbecility. Perhaps they would acquire ideas, if we made ourselves understood by them from childhood in a fixed, determinate, constant, and uniform manner; in short, if we traced on their hand the same characters that we trace upon paper, and invariably attached the same significance to them.'[1] The patient benevolence and ingenuity of Dr. Howe of Boston has realised in our own day the value of Diderot's suggestion.

One or two trifling points of literary interest may be noticed in the Letter on the Blind. Diderot refers to 'the ingenious expression of an English geometer that *God geometrizes*' (p. 294.) He is unaware apparently of the tradition which attributes the expression to Plato, though it is not found in Plato's writings. Plutarch, I believe, is the first person who mentions the saying, and discusses what Plato exactly meant by it. In truth, it is one of that large class of dicta which look more ingenious than they are true. There is a fine Latin passage by Barrow on the mighty geometry of the universe, and the reader of the *Religio Medici* may remember that Sir Thomas Browne pronounces God to be 'like a skilful geometrician.'

[1] P. 294.

An odd coincidence of simile is worth mentioning. Diderot says that 'great services are like large pieces of money, that we have seldom any occasion to use. Small attentions are a current coin that we always carry in our hands.' This is curiously like the saying in the *Tatler* that 'A man endowed with great perfections without good breeding, is like one who has his pockets full of gold, but wants change for his ordinary occasions.' Yet if Diderot had read the *Tatler*, he would certainly have referred to the story in No. 55, how William Jones of Newington, born blind, was brought to sight at the age of twenty—a story told in a manner after Diderot's own heart.

II.

It is proper in this place to mention a short philosophic piece which Diderot wrote in 1751, his *Letter on the Deaf and Dumb for the Use of those who Hear and Talk.* This is not, like the Letter on the Blind, the examination of a case of the Intellect deprived of one or more of the senses. It is substantially a fragment, and a very important fragment, on Æsthetics, and as such there will be something to say about it in another chapter. But there are perhaps one or two points at which the Letter on the Deaf and Dumb touches the line of thought of the Letter on the Blind.

The Letter opens on the question of the origin and *limits of inversion in language.* This at once leads to a discussion of the natural order of ideas and expressions, and that original order, says Diderot, we can

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only ascertain by a study of the language of gesture. Such a study can be pursued either in assiduous conversation with one who has been deaf and dumb from birth, or by the experiment of a *muet de convention*, a man who foregoes the use of articulate sounds for the sake of experiment as to the process of the formation of language. Generalising this idea, Diderot proceeds to consider man as distributed into as many distinct and separate beings as he has senses. 'My idea would be to decompose a man, so to speak, and to examine what he derives from each of the senses with which he is endowed. I have sometimes amused myself with this kind of metaphysical anatomy; and I found that of all the senses, the eye was the most superficial; the ear, the proudest; smell, the most voluptuous; taste, the most superstitious and the most inconstant; touch, the profoundest and the most of a philosopher. It would be amusing to get together a society, each member of which should have no more than one sense; there can be no doubt that they would all treat one another as out of their wits.'

This is interesting, because it was said at the time to be the source of one of the most famous fancies in the philosophical literature of the century, the Statue in Condillac's Treatise on the Sensations. Condillac imagined a statue organized like a man, but each sense unfolding itself singly, at the will of an eternal arbiter. The philosopher first admits the exercise of smell to his Frankenstein, and enumerates the mental faculties which might be expected to be set in operation under

the changing impressions made upon that one sense. The other senses are imparted to it in turn, one by one, each adding a new group of ideas to the previous stock, until at length the mental equipment is complete.

We may see the extent of the resemblance between Condillac's Statue and Diderot's *muet de convention*, but Diderot at least is free from the charge of borrowing. Condillac's book was published three years (1754) after the Letter on the Deaf and Dumb, and he afterwards wrote a pamphlet defending himself from the charge of having taken the fancy of his Statue from Diderot; nor, for that matter, did Diderot ever make sign or claim in the matter. We have already spoken of the relations between the two philosophers (above, p. 82), and though it is a mistake to describe Diderot as one of Condillac's most celebrated pupils,[1] yet there is just as little reason to invert the connection, or to doubt Condillac's own assertion that the Statue was suggested to him by Mademoiselle Ferrand, that remarkable woman to whose stimulating and directing influence he always professed such deep obligation. Attention has been called to the fact that in 1671 a Parisian bookseller published a Latin version of a much more intelligent and scientific fancy than the Statue,—the *Philosophus Autodidactus* of the Arabian, Ibn Tophail. This was a romance, in which a human being is suckled by a gazelle on a desert island in the tropics, and grows up in the manner of some Robinson Crusoe with a turn for psychological speculation, and

[1] Lewes's *Hist. Philos.*, ii. 342.

gradually becomes conscious, through observation, of the peculiar properties belonging to his senses.[1]

Of the part of the Letter that concerns gesture, one can only say that it appears astonishingly crude to those who know the progress that has been made since Diderot's time in collecting and generalising the curious groups of fact connected with gesture-language. We can imagine the eager interest that Diderot would have had in such curious observations as that gesture-language has something like a definite syntax; that it furnishes no means of distinguishing causation from sequence or simultaneity: that savages can understand and be understood with ease and certainty in a deaf-and-dumb school.[2] Diderot was acute enough to see that the questions of language could be solved, not by the old metaphysical methods, but only experientially. For the experiential method in this matter the time was not ripe. It was no wonder, then, that after a few pages, he broke away and hastened to æsthetics.

III.

Penalties on the publication of heretical opinion did not cease in England with the disappearance of the Licensing Act. But they were at least inflicted by law. It was the Court of King's Bench which, in 1730, visited Woolston with fine and imprisonment, after all the forms of a prosecution had been duly gone through. It was no Bishop's Court nor Star-Chamber,

[1] Rosenkranz, i. 102.

[2] Tylor's *Researches into the Early History of Mankind*, Chapters ii. and iii.; Lubbock's *Origin of Civilization*, Chapter ix.

much less a warrant signed by George the Third or by Bute, which in 1762 condemned Peter Annet to the pillory and the gaol for his Free Inquirer. The only evil which overtook Mandeville for his Fable of the Bees was to be harmlessly presented as a public nuisance by the Grand Jury of Middlesex (1723). We may contrast with this the state of things which prepared a revolution in France.

One morning in July, 1749—almost exactly forty years before that July of '89, so memorable in the annals of arbitrary government and state-prisons—a commissary of police and three attendants came to Diderot's house, made a vigorous scrutiny of his papers, and then produced a warrant for his detention. The philosopher, without any ado, told his wife not to expect him home for dinner, stepped into the chaise, and was driven off with his escort to Vincennes. His real offence was a light sneer in the Letter on the Blind at the mistress of a minister.[1] The atheistical substance of the essay, however, apart from the pique of a favourite, would have given sufficiently good grounds for a prosecution in England, and in France for that vile substitute for prosecution, the lettre-de-cachet. And there happened to be special causes for harshness towards the press at this moment. Verses had been published, satirising the king and his manner

[1] Madame Dupré de Saint Maur, who had found favour in the eyes of the Count d'Argenson. D'Argenson, younger brother of the Marquis who had been dismissed in 1747, was in power from 1743 to 1757. Notwithstanding his alleged share in Diderot's imprisonment, he was a tolerably steady protector of the philosophical party.

of life in bitter terms, and a stern raid was made upon all the scribblers in Paris. At the court there had just taken place one of those reactions in favour of the ecclesiastical party, which for thirty years in the court history alternated so frequently with movements in the opposite direction. The gossip of the town set down Diderot's imprisonment to a satire against the Jesuits, of which he was wrongly supposed to be the author.[1] It is not worth while to seek far for a reason, when authority was as able and ready to thrust men into gaol for a bad reason as for a good one. The writer or the printer of a philosophical treatise was at this moment regarded by the police much as a magistrate now looks on the wretch who vends infamous prints.

The lieutenant of police (Berryer) treated the miserable author with additional severity for stubbornly refusing to give up the name of the printer. Diderot was well aware that the printer would be sent to the galleys for life, if the lieutenant of police could once lay hands upon him. This personage, we may mention, was afterwards raised to the dignified office of keeper of the seals, as a reward for his industry and skill in providing victims for the royal brothel at Versailles.[2] The man who had ventured to use his mind, was thrown into the dungeon at Vincennes by the man who played spy and pander for the Pompadour. The official record of a dialogue between Berryer and Denis Diderot, 'of the Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman

[1] Barbier, iv. 337.

[2] There is a picture of Berryer, under the name of Orgon, in that very curious book, *L'Ecole de l'homme*, ii. 73.

religion,' is a singular piece of reading, if we remember that the prisoner's answers were made, 'after oath taken by the respondent to speak and answer the truth.'

'Interrogated if he has not composed a work entitled *Letters on the Blind.*

'Answered no.

'Interrogated by whom he had caused said work to be printed.

'Answered that he had not caused the said work to be printed.

'Interrogated if he knows the name of the author of the said work.

'Answered that he knows nothing about it.

'Interrogated whether he has not had said work in manuscript in his possession before it was printed.

'Answered that he had not had the said manuscript in his possession before or after it was printed.

'Interrogated whether he has not composed a work which appeared some years ago, entitled *Philosophic Thoughts.*

'Answered no.'

And so, after a dozen more replies of equal veracity, on reading being made to the respondent of the present interrogatory, Diderot 'said that the answers contain the truth, persisted in them, and signed,' as witness his hand. A sorrowful picture enough of the plight of an apostle of a new doctrine. On the other hand, the apostle of the new doctrine was perhaps good enough for the preachers of the old. Two years before this, the priest of the church of Saint Médard had thought it worth while to turn spy and informer. This is the report which the base creature sent to the lieutenant of police (1747):—

'Diderot, a man of no profession, living, &c., is a young man

who plays the free-thinker, and glories in impiety. He is the author of several works of philosophy, in which he attacks religion. His talk is like his books. He is busy at the composition of one now, which is very dangerous.'

The priest's delation was confirmed presently by a still lower agent of authority, who, in bad grammar and bad spelling, describes 'this wretch Diderot as a very dangerous man, who speaks of the holy mysteries of our religion with contempt; who corrupts manners, and who says that when he comes to the last moment of his life, he will have to do like others, will confess, and will receive what we call our God, but it will only be for the sake of his family.'[1]

All these things had prepared an unfriendly fate for Diderot when his time at last came, as it came to most of his friends. For a month he was cut off from the outer world. His only company was the *Paradise Lost*, which he happened to have in his pocket at the moment of his arrest. He compounded an ink for himself, by scraping the slate at the side of his window, grinding it very fine, and mixing with wine in a broken glass. A toothpick, found by happy accident in the pocket of his waistcoat, served him for pen, and the fly-leaves and margins of the Milton made a repository for his thoughts. With a simple but very characteristic interest in others who might be as unfortunate as himself, he wrote upon the walls of his prison his short recipe for writing materials.[2] Diderot might easily have been buried here for months

[1] Pieces given in Diderot's Works, xx. 121—3. [2] Naigeon, p. 131.

or even years. But, as it happened, the governor of Vincennes was a kinsman of Voltaire's divine Emily, the Marquise du Châtelet. When Voltaire, who was then at Lunéville, heard of Diderot's ill fortune, he proclaimed as usual his detestation of a land where bigots can shut up philosophers under lock and key, and as usual he at once set to work to lessen the wrong. Madame du Châtelet was made to write to the governor, praying him to soften the imprisonment of Socrates-Diderot as much as he could.[1] It was the last of her good deeds, for she died in circumstances of grotesque tragedy in the following month (Sept. 1749), and her husband, her son, Voltaire, and Saint Lambert, alternately consoled and reproached one another over her grave. Diderot meanwhile had the benefit of her intervention. He was transferred from the dungeon to the château, was allowed to wander about the park on his parole, and to receive visits from his friends. One of the most impulsive of these friends was Jean Jacques. Their first meeting after Diderot's imprisonment has been described by Rousseau himself, in terms at which the phlegmatic will smile—not wisely, for the manner of expressing emotion, like all else, is relative. 'After three or four centuries of impatience, I flew into the arms of my friend. O indescribable moment! He was not alone; D'Alembert and the treasurer of the Sainte Chapelle were with him. As I went in I saw no one but himself. With a single bound and a

[1] Voltaire's *Corr.* July and Aug., 1749.

cry, I pressed his face close to mine, I clasped him tightly in my arms, without speaking to him save by my tears and sobs; I was choking with tenderness and joy.'[1] After this Rousseau used to walk over to see him two or three times a week. It was during one of these walks on a hot summer afternoon that he first thought of that memorable literary effort, the essay against civilization. He sank down at the foot of a tree, and feverishly wrote a page or two to show to his friend. He tells us that but for Diderot's encouragement he should hardly have executed his design. There is a story that it was Diderot who first suggested to Rousseau to affirm that arts and sciences had corrupted manners. There is no violent improbability in this. Diderot, for all the robustness and penetration of his judgment, was yet often borne by his natural impetuosity towards the region of paradox. His own curious and bold *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville* is entirely in the vein of Rousseau's discourse on the superiority of primitive over civilized life. 'Prodigious sybil of the eighteenth century,' cries Michelet, 'the mighty magician Diderot! He breathed out one day a breath; lo, there sprang up a man—Rousseau.'[2] It is hard to believe that such an astonishing genius for literature as Rousseau's could have lain concealed after he had once inhaled the vivifying air of Paris. Yet the fire and inspiring energy of Diderot may well have been the quickening accident that brought his genius into productive life. All the testimony goes to

[1] *Conf.*, II., viii. [2] Michelet's *Louis XV.*, p. 258.

show that it was so. Whether, however, Diderot is really responsible for the perverse direction of Rousseau's argument is a question of fact, and the evidence is not decisive.[1] It would be an odd example of the giant's nonchalance which is always so amazing in Diderot, if he really instigated the most eloquent and passionate writer then alive to denounce art and science as the scourge of mankind, at the very moment when he was himself straining his whole effort to spread the arts and sciences abroad, and to cover them with glory in men's eyes.

Among Diderot's other visitors was Madame de Puisieux. One day she came clad in gay apparel, bound for a merry-making at a neighbouring village. Diderot, conceiving jealous doubts of her fidelity, received assurance that she would be solitary and companionless at the feast, thinking mournfully of her persecuted philosopher lying in prison. She forgot that one of the parents of philosophy is curiosity, and that Diderot had trained himself in the school of the sceptics. That evening he scaled the walls of the park of Vincennes, flew to the scene of the festival, and there found what he had expected. In vain for her had he written upon virtue and merit, and the unhallowed friendship came to an end.

After three months of captivity, Diderot was released. The booksellers who were interested in the Encyclopædia were importunate with the authorities to restore its head and chief to an enterprise that

[1] See the present author's *Rousseau*, i. 131—2.

stirred universal curiosity.[1] For the first volume of that famous work was now almost ready to appear, and expectation was keen. The idea of the book had occurred to Diderot in 1745, and from 1745 to 1765 it was the absorbing occupation of his life. Of the value and significance of the conception underlying this immense operation I shall speak in the next chapter. There also I shall describe its history. The circumstances under which these five-and-thirty volumes were given to the world mark Diderot for one of the few true heroes of literature. They called into play some of the most admirable of human qualities. They required a laboriousness as steady and as prolonged, a wariness as alert, a grasp of plan as firm, a fortitude as patient, unvarying, and unshaken, as men are accustomed to applaud in the engineer who constructs some vast and difficult work, or the commander who directs a hardy and dangerous expedition.

[1] For the two petitions of the booksellers to D'Argenson praying for Diderot's liberty, see M. Assézat's preliminary notice. *Œuv.* xiii. 112, etc.

## *CHAPTER V.*

### *THE ENCYCLOPÆDIA.*

THE history of the encyclopædic conception of human knowledge is a much more interesting and important object of inquiry than a list of the various encyclopædic enterprises to be found in the annals of literature. Yet it is proper here to mention some of the attempts in this direction which preceded our memorable book of the eighteenth century. It is to Aristotle, no doubt, that we must look for the first glimpse of the idea that human knowledge is a totality, whose parts are all closely and organically connected with one another. But the idea that only dawned in that gigantic understanding, was lost for many centuries. The compilations of Pliny are not in a right sense encyclopædic, being presided over by no definite idea of informing order. It was not until the later middle age that any attempt was made to present knowledge as a whole. Albertus Magnus, 'the ape of Aristotle' (1193—1280), left for a space the three great questions of the existence of universals, of the modes of the existence of species and genus, and of their place in or out of the bosom of the individuals, and executed a compilation of such physical facts as

had been then discovered.[1] A more distinctly encyclopædic work was the book of Vincent de Beauvais (d. 1264), called *Speculum naturale, morale, doctrinale, et historiale*,—a compilation from Aquinas in some parts, and from Aristotle in others. Hallam mentions three other compilations of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and observes that their laborious authors did not much improve the materials which they had amassed in their studies, though they sometimes arranged them conveniently. In the mediæval period, as he remarks, the want of capacity to discern probable truths was a very great drawback from the value of their compilations.[2]

Far the most striking production of the thirteenth century in this kind was the *Opus Majus* of Roger Bacon (1267), of which it has been said that it is at once the Encyclopædia and the Novum Organum of that age;[3] at once a summary of knowledge, and the suggestion of a truer method. This however was merely the introductory sketch to a vaster encyclopædic work, the *Compendium Philosophiæ*, which was not perfected. 'In common with minds of great and comprehensive grasp, his vivid perception of the intimate relationship of the different parts of philosophy, and his desire to raise himself from the dead level of every individual science, induced Bacon to grasp at and embrace the whole.'[4] In truth, the encyclopædic

[1] Jourdain's *Recherches sur les traductions latines d'Aristote*, p. 325.
[2] *Lit. of Europe*, pt. i. ch. ii. § 39.
[3] Whewell's *Hist. Induct. Sci.*, xii. c. 7.
[4] Fr. Roger Bacon; J. S. Brewer's Pref., pp. 57, 63.

spirit was in the air throughout the thirteenth century. It was the century of books bearing the significant titles of Summa or Universitas or Speculum.

The same spirit revived towards the middle of the sixteenth century. In 1541 a book was published at Basel by one Ringelberg, which first took the name of Cyclopædia, that has since then become so familiar a word in Western Europe. This was followed within sixty years by several other works of the same kind. The movement reached its height in a book which remained the best in its order for a century. A German, one J. H. Alsted (1588—1638), published in 1620 an *Encyclopædia scientiarum omnium.* A hundred years later the illustrious Leibnitz pronounced it a worthy task to perfect and amend Alsted's book. What was wanting to the excellent man, he said, was neither labour nor judgment, but material and the good fortune of such days as ours. And Leibnitz wrote a paper of suggestions for its extension and improvement.[1] Alsted's Encyclopædia is of course written in Latin, and he prefixes to it by way of motto the celebrated lines in which Lucretius declares that nothing is sweeter than to dwell apart in the serene temples of the wise. Though he informs us in the preface that his object was to trace the outlines of the great 'latifundium regni philosophici' in a single syntagma, yet he really does no more than arrange a number of separate treatises or manuals, and even dictionaries, within the limits of a couple of folios. As

[1] Leibnitii Opera, v. 184

is natural to the spirit of the age in which he wrote, great predominance is given to the verbal sciences of grammar, rhetoric, and formal logic, and a verbal or logical division regulates the distribution of the matter, rather than a scientific regard for its objective relations.

For the true parentage, however, of the Encyclopædia of Diderot and D'Alembert it is unnecessary to prolong this list. It was Francis Bacon's idea of the systematic classification of knowledge which inspired Diderot, and guided his hand throughout. 'If we emerge from this vast operation,' he wrote in the Prospectus, 'our principal debt will be to the chancellor Bacon, who sketched the plan of a universal dictionary of sciences and arts at a time when there were not, so to say, either arts or sciences.' This sense of profound and devoted obligation was shared by D'Alembert, and was expressed a hundred times in the course of the work. No more striking panegyric has ever been passed upon our immortal countryman than is to be found in the Preliminary Discourse.[1] The French Encyclopædia was the direct fruit of Bacon's magnificent conceptions. And if the efficient origin of the Encyclopædia was English, so did the occasion rise in England also.

In 1727 Ephraim Chambers, a Westmoreland Quaker, published in London two folios, entitled a Cyclopædia or Universal Dictionary of the Arts and Sciences. The idea of it was broad and excellent. 'Our view,'

[1] *Œuv. de D'Alembert*, i. 63.

says Chambers, 'was to consider the several matters not only in themselves, but relatively, or as they respect each other; both to treat them as so many wholes, and as so many parts of some greater whole.' The compiler lacked the grasp necessary to realise this laudable purpose. The book has, however, the merit of conciseness, and is a singular monument of literary industry, for it was entirely compiled by Chambers himself. It had a great success, and though its price was high (four guineas), it ran through five editions in eighteen years. On the whole, however, it is meagre, and more like a dictionary, than an encyclopædia such as Alsted's for instance.

Some fifteen years after the publication of Chambers's Cyclopædia, an Englishman (Mills) and a German (Sellius) went to Le Breton with a project for its translation into French. The bookseller obtained the requisite privilege from the government, but he obtained it for himself, and not for the projectors. This trick led to a quarrel, and before it was settled the German died and the Englishman returned to his own country. They left the translation behind them duly executed.[1] Le Breton then carried the undertaking to a certain abbé, Gua de Malves. Gua de Malves (b. 1712) seems to have been a man of a busy and ingenious mind. He was the translator of Berkeley's *Hylas and Philonous*, of Anson's Voyages, and of various English tracts on currency and political

[1] *Mém.* pour J. P. F. Luneau de Boisjermain, 4to, Paris, 1771. See also Diderot's *Prospectus*, 'La traduction entière de Chambers nous a passé sous les yeux,' etc.

economy. It is said that he first suggested the idea of a cyclopædia on a fuller plan,[1] but we have no evidence of this. In any case, the project made no advance in his hands. The embarrassed bookseller next applied to Diderot, who was then much in need of work that should bring him bread. His fertile and energetic intelligence transformed the scheme. By an admirable intuition, he divined the opportunity which would be given by the encyclopædic form, of gathering up into a whole all that new thought and modern knowledge, which existed as yet in unsystematic and uninterpreted fragments. His enthusiasm fired Le Breton. It was resolved to make Chambers's work a mere starting-point for a new enterprise of far wider scope.

'The old and learned D'Aguesseau,' says Michelet, 'notwithstanding the pitiable, the wretched sides of his character, had two lofty sides, his reform of the laws, and a personal passion, the taste and urgent need of universality, a certain encyclopædic sense. A young man came to him one day, a man of letters living by his pen, and somewhat under a cloud for one or two hazardous books that lack of bread had driven him to write. Yet this stranger of dubious repute wrought a miracle. With bewilderment the old sage listened to him unrolling the gigantic scheme of a book that should be all books. On his lips, sciences were light and life. It was more than speech, it was creation. One would have said that he had made

[1] Biog. Universelle, s. v.

these sciences, and was still at work, adding, extending, fertilising, ever engendering. The effect was incredible. D'Aguesseau, a moment above himself, forgot the old man, received the infection of genius, and became great with the greatness of the other. He had faith in the young man, and protected the Encyclopædia.'[1]

A fresh privilege was procured (Jan. 21, 1746), and as Le Breton's capital was insufficient for a project of this magnitude, he invited three other booksellers to join him, retaining a half share for himself, and allotting the other moiety to them. As Le Breton was not strong enough to bear the material burdens of producing a work on so gigantic a scale as was now proposed, so Diderot felt himself unequal to the task of arranging and supervising every department of a book that was to include the whole circle of the sciences. He was not skilled enough in mathematics, nor in physics, which were then for the most part mathematically conceived. For that province, he associated with himself as an editorial colleague one of the most conspicuous and active members of the philosophical party. Of this eminent man, whose relations with Diderot were for some years so intimate, it is proper that we should say something.

[1] Michelet, *Louis XV.*, 258. D'Aguesseau (1668—1751) has left one piece which ought to be extricated from the thirteen quartos of his works, his memoir of his father (*Œuv.* xiii.). This is one of those records of solid and elevated character, which do more to refresh and invigorate the reader than a whole library of religious or ethical exhortations can do. It has the loftiness, the refined austerity, the touching impressiveness of Tacitus's *Agricola* or Condorcet's *Turgot*, together with a certain grave sweetness that was almost peculiar to the Jansenist school of the seventeenth century.

D'Alembert was the natural son of Madame de Tencin, by whom he had been barbarously exposed immediately after his birth. 'The true ancestors of a man of genius,' says Condorcet finely upon this circumstance, 'are the masters who have gone before him, and his true descendants are disciples that are worthy of him.' He was discovered on a November night in the year 1717, by the beadle in a nearly dying condition on the steps of the church of St. John the Round, from which he afterwards took his Christian name. An honest woman of the common people, with that personal devotion which is less rare among the poor than among the rich, took charge of the foundling. The father, who was an officer of artillery—called by some La Touche, by others Destouches—by and by advanced the small sums required to pay for the boy's schooling. D'Alembert proved a brilliant student. Unlike nearly every other member of the encyclopædic party, he was a pupil, not of the Jesuits but of their rivals. The Jansenists recognised the keenness and force of their pupil, and hoped that they had discovered a new Pascal. But he was less docile than his great predecessor in their ranks. When his studies were completed, he devoted himself to geometry, for which he had a passion that nothing could extinguish. For the old monastic vow of poverty, chastity, and obedience, he adopted the manlier substitute of poverty, truth, and liberty—the worthy device of every man of letters. When he awoke in the morning, he thought with delight of the work that had

been begun the previous day and would occupy the day before him. In the necessary intervals of his meditations, he recalled the lively pleasure he felt at the play: at the play, between the acts, he thought of the still greater pleasure that was promised to him by the work of the morrow. His mathematical labours led to valuable results in the principles of equilibrium and the movement of fluids, in a new calculus, and in a new solution of the problem of the precession of the equinoxes.[1]

These contributions to what was then the most popular of the sciences brought him fame, and fame brought him its usual distractions. As soon as a writer has shown himself the possessor of gifts that may be of value to society, then society straightway sets to work to seduce and hinder him from diligently exercising them. D'Alembert resisted these influences steadfastly. His means were very limited, yet he could never be induced to increase them at the cost either of his social independence or of his scientific pursuits. He lived for forty years under the humble roof of the poor woman who had treated him as a son. 'You will never be anything better than a philosopher,' she used to cry reproachfully, 'and what is a philosopher? 'Tis a madman who torments himself all his life, that people may talk about him when he is dead.' D'Alembert zealously adhered to his destination. Frederick the Great vainly tempted him by an offer of the suc-

[1] A short estimate of D'Alembert's principal scientific pieces, by M. Bertram, is to be found in the *Rev. des Deux Mondes*, for October 1865.

cession to Maupertuis as president of the Academy of Berlin. Although, however, he declined to accept the post, he enjoyed all its authority and prerogative. Frederick always consulted him in filling up vacancies and making appointments. It is a magnanimous trait in D'Alembert's history that he should have procured for Lagrange a position and livelihood at Berlin, warmly commending him as a man of rare and superior genius, although Lagrange had vigorously opposed some of his own mathematical theories. Ten years after Frederick's offer, the other great potentate of the north, Catherine of Russia, besought him to undertake the education of the young grand duke, her son. But neither urgent flatteries and solicitations under the imperial hand, nor the munificent offer of a hundred thousand francs a year, availed to draw him away from his independence and his friends. The great Frederick used to compare him to one of those oriental monarchs who cherish a strict seclusion in order to enhance their importance and majesty. He did not refuse a pension of some fifty pounds a year from Berlin, and the same amount was bestowed upon him from the privy purse at Versailles. He received a small annual sum in addition from the Academy.

Though the mathematical sciences remained the objects of his special study, D'Alembert was as free as the other great men of the encyclopædic school from the narrowness of the pure specialist. He naturally reminds us of the remarkable saying imputed to

Leibnitz, that he only attributed importance to science because it enabled him to speak with authority in philosophy and religion. His correspondence with Voltaire, extending over the third quarter of the century, is the most instructive record that we possess of the many-sided doings of that busy time. His series of éloges on the academicians who died between 1700 and 1772 is one of the most interesting works in the department of literary history. He paid the keenest attention to the great and difficult art of writing. Translations from Tacitus, Bacon, and Addison show his industry in a useful practice. A long collection of synonyms bears witness to his fine discrimination in the use of words. And the clearness, precision, and reserved energy of his own prose mark the success of the pains that he took with style. He knew the secret. Have lofty sentiments, he said, and your manner of writing will be firm and noble.[1] Yet he did not ignore the other side and half of the truth, which is expressed in the saying of another important writer of that day,—By taking trouble to speak with precision, one gains the habit of thinking rightly. (*Condillac.*)

Like so many others to whom literature owes much, D'Alembert was all his life fighting against bad health. Like Voltaire and Rousseau, he was born dying, and he remained delicate and valetudinarian to the end. He had the mental infirmities belonging to his temperament. He was restless, impatient, mobile,

[1] *Œuvres de D'Alembert*, iv. 367.

susceptible of irritation. When the young mademoiselle Phlipon, in after years famous as wife of the virtuous Roland, was taken to a sitting of the Academy, she was curious to see the author of the Preliminary Discourse to the Encyclopædia, but his small face and sharp thin voice made her reflect with some disappointment, that the writings of a philosopher are better to know than his mask.[1] In everything except zeal for light and emancipation, D'Alembert was the opposite of Diderot. Where Diderot was exuberant, prodigal, and disordered, D'Alembert was a precisian. Difference of temperament, however, did not prevent their friendship from being for many years cordial and intimate. When the Encyclopædia was planned, it was to D'Alembert, as we have said, that Diderot turned for aid in the mathematical sciences, where his own knowledge was not sufficiently full nor well-grounded. They were in strong and singular agreement in their idea of the proper place and function of the man of letters. One of the most striking facts about their alliance, and one of the most important facts in the history of the Encyclopædia, is that henceforth the profession of letters became at once definite and independent. Diderot and D'Alembert both of them remained poor, but they were never hangers-on. They did not look to patrons, nor did they bound their vision by Versailles. They were the first to assert the lawful authority of the new priesthood. They revolted deliberately and in set form against the old system of

[1] *Œuv. de J. M. Ph. Roland*, i. 230 [edit. 1800].

suitorship and protection. 'Happy are men of letters,' wrote D'Alembert, 'if they recognise at last that the surest way of making themselves respected is to live united and almost shut up among themselves; that by this union they will come without any trouble to give the law to the rest of the nation in all affairs of taste and philosophy; that the true esteem is that which is awarded by men who are themselves worthy of esteem. . . . . As if the art of instructing and enlightening men were not, after the too rare art of good government, the noblest portion and gift in human reach.'[1]

This consciousness of the power and exaltation of their calling which men of letters now acquired, is much more than the superficial fact which it may at first seem to be. It marked the rise of a new teaching order and the supersession of the old. The highest moral ideas now belonged no longer to the clergy, but to the writers; no longer to official Catholicism, but to that fertilising medley of new notions about human knowledge and human society which then went by the name of philosophy. What is striking is that the ideas sown by philosophy became eventually the source of higher life in Catholicism. If the church of the revolution showed something that we may justly admire, it was because the encyclopædic band had involuntarily and inevitably imparted a measure of their own clear-

[1] *Essai sur la Société des Gens de Lettres et des Grands*, etc. *Œuv.* iv. 372. 'Write,' he says, 'as if you loved glory; in conduct, act as if it were indifferent to you.' Compare, with reference to the passage in the text, Duclos's remark (*Consid. sur les Mœurs*, ch. xi.): 'The man in power commands, but the intelligent govern, because in time they form public opinion, and that sooner or later subjugates every kind of despotism.' Only partially true.

sightedness, fortitude, moral energy, and spirit of social improvement, to a church which was, when they began their work, an abominable burden on the spiritual life of the nation. If the Catholicism of Chateaubriand, of Lamennais, of Montalembert, was a different thing from the Catholicism of a Dubois or a Rohan, from the vile corruptions of the Jesuits and the grovelling superstitions of the later Jansenists, it was the execrated freethinkers whom the church and mankind had to thank for the change. The most enlightened Catholic of to-day ought to admit that Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau, were the true reformers of his creed. They supplied it with ideas which saved it from becoming finally a curse to civilisation. It was no Christian prelate, but Diderot who burst the bonds of a paralysing dogma by the magnificent cry *Détruisez ces enceintes qui rétrécissent vos idées! Elargissez Dieu!*[1] We see the same phenomenon in our own day. The Christian churches are assimilating as rapidly as their formulæ will permit the new light and the more generous moral ideas and the higher spirituality of teachers who have abandoned all churches, and who are systematically denounced as enemies of the souls of men. *Sic vos non vobis mellificatis apes!* These transformations of religion by leavening elements contributed from a foreign doctrine, are the most interesting process in the history of truth.

The Encyclopædia became a powerful engine for aid-

[1] Pensées Philos., § 26.

ing such a transformation. Because it was this, and because it rallied all that was then best in France round the standard of light and social hope, we ought hardly to grudge time or pains to its history. For it was not merely in the field of religious ideas that the Encyclopædists led France in a new way. They affected the national life on every side, pressing forward with enlightened principles in all the branches of material and political organisation. Their union in a great philosophical band gave an impressive significance to their work. The collection within a single set of volumes of a body of new truths relating to so many of the main interests of men, invested the book and its writers with an aspect of universality, of collective and organic doctrine, which the writers themselves would without doubt have disowned, and which it is easy to dissolve by tests of logic. But the popular impression that the Encyclopædists constituted a single body with a common doctrine and a common aim was practically sound. Comte has pointed out with admirable clearness the merit of the conception of an encyclopædic workshop.[1] It united the members of rival destructive schools in a great constructive task. It furnished a rallying-point for efforts otherwise the most divergent. Their influence was precisely what it would have been, if popular impressions had been literally true. Diderot and D'Alembert did their best to heighten this feeling. They missed no occasion of fixing a sentiment of co-operation and fellowship.

[1] *Phil. Pos.*, v. 520. *Polit. Pos.*, iii. 584.

They spoke of their dictionary as the transactions of an Academy.[1] Each writer was answerable for his own contribution, but he was in the position of a member of some learned corporation. To every volume, until the great crisis of 1759, was prefixed a list of those who had contributed to it. If a colleague died, the public was informed of the loss which the work had sustained, and his services were worthily commemorated in a formal éloge.[2] Feuds, epigrams, and offences were not absent, but on the whole there was steadfast and generous fraternity.

As Voltaire eloquently said, officers of war by land and by sea, magistrates, physicians who knew nature, men of letters whose taste purified knowledge, geometers, physicists, all united in a work that was as useful as it was laborious, without any view of interest, without even seeking fame, as many of them concealed their names; finally without any common understanding and agreement, and therefore without anything of the spirit of party.[3] Turning over the pages on which the list of writers is inscribed, we find in one place or another nearly every name that has helped to make the literature of the time famous. Montesquieu, who died in the beginning of 1755, left behind him the unfinished fragment of an article on Taste, and it may be noticed in passing that our good-natured Diderot was the only man of letters who attended the remains of the illustrious writer to the grave.[4] The article

[1] See Pref. to vol. iii.
[2] For instance, see Pref. to vol. vi.
[3] *Siècle de Louis XV.*, ch. 43.
[4] Grimm, *Corr. Lit.*, i. 273. Diderot, *Œuv.*, iv. 15.

itself, though no more than a fragment, has all the charms of Montesquieu's delightful style; it is serious without pedantry, graceful without levity, and is rich in observations that are precise and pointed without the vice of emphasis. The great Turgot, diligently solicitous for the success of every enterprise that promised to improve human happiness by adding to knowledge and spreading enlightenment, wrote some of the most valuable articles that the work contained, and his discussion of Endowments perhaps still remains the weightiest contribution to that important subject. Oddly enough he was one of the very few writers who refused to sign his name to his contributions.[1] His assistance only ceased when he perceived that the scheme was being coloured by that spirit of sect, which he always counted the worst enemy of the spirit of truth.[2] Jean Jacques Rousseau, who had just won a singular reputation by his paradoxes on natural equality and the corruptions of civilisation, furnished the articles on music in the first half-dozen volumes. They were not free from mistakes, but his colleagues chivalrously defended him by the plea of careless printing or indifferent copying.[3] The stately Buffon very early in the history of the Encyclopædia sent them an article upon Nature, and the editors made haste to announce to their subscribers the advent

[1] *Avertissement* to vol. vi.; also to vol. vii. Turgot's articles were Etymologie, Existence, Expansibilité, Foires, Fondations. The text of these is wrongly inserted among Diderot's contributions to the Encyclopædia in the new edition of his Works, xv. 12.

[2] Condorcet's *Vie de Turgot*.

[3] Pref. to vol. iii. (1753), and to vol. vi. (1756).

of so superb a colleague.[1] The articles on natural history, however, were left by Buffon in his usual majestic fashion to his faithful lieutenant and squire at arms, Daubenton. And even his own article seems not to have been printed. Before the eleventh volume appeared, terrible storms had arisen, not a few of the shipmen had parted company, and Buffon may well have been one of them. Certainly the article on Nature, as it stands, can hardly be his.

In the supplementary volumes, which appeared in 1776—ten years after the completion of the original undertaking—two new labourers came into the vineyard, whose names add fresh lustre and give still more serious value to the work. One of these was the prince of the physiologists of the eighteenth century, the great Haller, who contributed an elaborate history of those who had been his predecessors in unfolding the intricate mechanism of the human frame, and analysing its marvels of complex function. The other was the austere and generous Condorcet. Ever loyal to good causes, and resolute against despairing of the human commonwealth, he began in the pages of the Encyclopædia a career that was brilliant with good promise and high hopes, and ended in the grim hall of the Convention and a nobly tragic death amid the red storm of the Terror.

Among the lesser stars in the encyclopædic firmament are some whose names ought not to be wholly

[1] Pref. to vol. ii.

omitted. Forbonnais, one of the most instructive economic writers of the century, contributed articles to the early volumes, which were afterwards republished in his Elements of Commerce.[1] The light-hearted Marmontel wrote cheerful articles on Comedy, Eloges, Eclogues, Glory, and other matters of literature and taste. Quesnai, the eminent founder of the economic sect, dealt with two agricultural subjects, and reproduced both his theoretical paradoxes and his admirable practical maxims on the material prosperity of nations. D'Holbach, not yet author of the memorable System of Nature, compiled a vast number of the articles on chemistry and mineralogy, chiefly and avowedly from German sources, he being the only writer of the band with a mastery of a language which was at that moment hardly more essential to culture than Russian is now. The name of Duclos should not be passed over in the list of the foremost men who helped to raise the encyclopædic monument. He was one of the shrewdest and most vigorous intelligences of the time, being in the front rank of men of the second order. His quality was coarse, but this was only the defect of a thoroughly penetrating and masculine understanding. His articles in the Encyclopædia (*Déclamation des Anciens*, *Etiquette*, etc.) are not very remarkable, but the reflections on conduct which he styled *Considérations sur les Mœurs de ce Siècle* (1750), though rather hard in tone, abound in

[1] Grimm, *Corr. Lit.* i. 130. Forbonnais's chief work is his *Recherches et Considérations sur les finances de la France*.

an acuteness, a breadth, a soundness of perception, that entitle the book to the rare distinction, among the writings of moralists and social observers, of still being worth reading. Morellet wrote upon some of the subjects of theology, and his contributions are remarkable as being the chief examples in the record of the encyclopædic body of a distinctively and deliberately historic treatment of religion. 'I let people see,' he wrote many years after, 'that in such a collection as the Encyclopædia we ought to treat the history and experience of the dogmas and discipline of the Christian exactly like those of the religion of Brahma or Mahomet.'[1] This sage and philosophic principle enabled him to write the article, Fils de Dieu (vol. vi.), without sliding into Arian, Nestorian, Socinian, or other heretical view on that fantastic theme. We need not linger over the names of other writers, who indeed are now little more than mere shadows of names, such as La Condamine, a scientific traveller of fame and merit in his day and generation; of Du Marsais, the poverty-stricken and unlucky scholar who wrote articles on grammar; of the President Des Brosses, who was unfortunate enough to be in the right in a quarrel about money with Voltaire, and who has since been better known to readers through the fury of the provoked patriarch, than through his own meritorious contributions to the early history of civilisation.

The name of one faithful worker in the building of

[1] *Avert.* to vol. ii.

this new Jerusalem ought not to be omitted, though his writings were *multa non multum*. The Chevalier de Jaucourt (1704—1779), as his title shows, was the younger son of a noble house. He studied at Geneva, Cambridge, and Leyden, and published in 1734 a useful account of the life and writings of Leibnitz. When the Encyclopædia was projected, his services were at once secured, and he became its slave from the beginning of A to the end of Z. He wrote articles in his own special subjects of natural history and physical science, but he was always ready to lend his help in other departments, in writing, re-writing, reading, correcting, and all those other humbler necessities of editorship of which the inconsiderate reader knows little and thinks less. Jaucourt revelled in this drudgery. God made him for grinding articles, said Diderot. For six or seven years, he wrote one day, Jaucourt has been in the middle of half-a-dozen secretaries, reading, dictating, slaving, for thirteen or fourteen hours a day, and he is not tired of it even now. When he was told that the work must positively be brought to an end, his countenance fell, and the prospect of release from such happy bondage filled his heart with desolation.[1] 'If,' says Diderot in the preface to the eighth volume (1765), 'we have raised a shout of joy like the sailor when he espies land after a sombre night that has kept him midway between sky and flood, it is to M. de Jaucourt that we are indebted for it. What has he not done for us,

[1] Nov. 10, 1760, xix. 24. Also, Oct. 7, 1761, xix. 35.

especially in these latter times? With what constancy has he not refused all the solicitations, whether of friendship or of authority, that sought to take him away from us? Never has sacrifice of repose, of health, of interest been more absolute and more entire.'[1] These modest and unwearying helpers in good works ought not to be wholly forgotten in a commemoration of more far-shining names.

Besides those who were known to the conductors of the Encyclopædia, was a host of unsought volunteers. 'The further we proceed,' the editors announced in the preface to the sixth volume (1756), 'the more are we sensible of the increase both in matter and in number of those who are good enough to second our efforts.' They received many articles on the same subject. They were constantly embarrassed by an emulation which, however flattering as a testimony to their work, obliged them to make a difficult choice, or to lose a good article, or to sacrifice one of their regular contributors, or to offend some influential newcomer. Everyone who had a new idea in his head, or what he thought a new idea, sent them an article upon it. Men who were priests or pastors by profession and unbelievers in their hearts, sent them sheaves of articles in which they permitted themselves the delicious luxury of saying a little of what they thought. Women, too, pressed into the great work. Unknown ladies volunteered sprightly explanations of the technicalities of costume, from the

[1] See also Preface to vol. iii.

falbala which adorned the bottom of their skirts, up to that little knot of riband in the hair, which had come to replace the old appalling edifice of ten stories high, in hierarchic succession of duchess, solitary, musketeer, crescent, firmament, tenth heaven, and mouse.[1] The oldest contributor was Lenglet du Fresnoy, whose book on the Method of Studying History is still known to those who have examined the development of men's ideas about the relations of the present to the past. Lenglet was born in 1674. The youngest of the band was Condorcet, who was born nearly seventy years later (1743). One veteran, Morellet, who had been the schoolmate of Turgot and Loménie de Brienne, lived to think of many things more urgent than Faith, Fils de Dieu, and Fundamentals. He survived the Revolution, the Terror, the Empire, Waterloo, the Restoration, and died in 1819, within sight of the Holy Alliance and the Peterloo massacre. From the birth of Lenglet to the death of Morellet—what an arc of the circle of western experience!

No one will ask whether the keen eye and stimulating word and helpful hand of Voltaire were wanting to an enterprise which was to awaken men to new love of tolerance, enlightenment, charity and justice. Voltaire was playing the refractory courtier at Potsdam when the first two volumes appeared. With characteristic vehemence he instantly pronounced it a work which should be the glory of France, and the

[1] *Avert.* to vol. vi., and s. v. *Fontange.* Grimm, i. 451.

shame of its persecutors. Diderot and D'Alembert were raising an immortal edifice, and he would gladly furnish them with a little stone here or there, which they might find convenient to stuff into some corner or crevice in the wall. He was incessant in his industry. Unlike those feebler and more consequential spirits, the *petits-maîtres* of thought, by whom editors are harassed and hindered, this great writer was as willing to undertake small subjects as large ones, and to submit to all the mutilations and modifications which the exigencies of the work and the difficulties of its conductors recommended to them.[1] As the structure progresses, his enthusiasm waxes warmer. Diderot and his colleague are cutting their wings for a flight to posterity. They are Atlas and Hercules bearing a world upon their shoulders. It is the greatest work in the world; it is a superb pyramid; its printing-office is the office for the instruction of the human race; and so forth, in every phrase of stimulating sympathy and energetic interest. Nor does his sympathy blind him to faults of execution. Voltaire's good sense and sound judgment were as much at the service of his friends in warning them of shortcomings, as in eulogising what they achieved. And he had good faith enough to complain to his friends, instead of complaining of them. In one place he tells them, what is perfectly true, that their journeymen are far too declamatory, and too much addicted to substitute vague and puerile dissertations

[1] *Corresp. avec D'Alembert* (Œur. lxxv.), Sept. 1755, Feb. 1757, etc.

for that solid instruction which is what the reader of an Encyclopædia seeks. In another he remonstrates against certain frivolous affectations and some of the coxcombries of literary modishness. Everywhere he recommends them to insist on a firm and distinct method in their contributors—etymologies, definitions, examples, reasons, clearness, brevity. 'You are badly seconded,' he writes; 'there are bad soldiers in the army of a great general.'[1] 'I am sorry to see that the writer of the article *Hell* declares that hell was a point in the doctrine of Moses; now by all the devils that is not true. Why lie about it? Hell is an excellent thing, to be sure, but it is evident that Moses did not know it. 'Tis this world that is hell.'[2]

D'Alembert in reply always admitted the blemishes for which the patriarch and master reproached them, but urged various pleas in extenuation. He explains that Diderot is not always the master, either to reject or to prune the articles that are offered to him.[3] A writer who happened to be useful for many excellent articles would insist as the price of good work that they should find room for his bad work also; and so forth. 'No doubt we have bad articles in theology and metaphysics, but with theologians for censors, and a privilege, I defy you to make them any better. There are other articles that are less exposed to the daylight, and in them all is repaired. Time will enable people to distinguish what we have thought

[1] Dec. 22, 1757. [2] May 24, 1757. [3] Dec. 13, 1756, April, 1756.

from what we have said.'[1] This last is a bitter and humiliating word, but before any man hastens to cast a stone, let him first make sure that his own life is free from every trace of hypocritical conformity and mendacious compliance. Condorcet seems to make the only remark that is worth making, when he says that the true shame and disgrace of these dissemblings lay not with the writers, whose only other alternative was to leave the stagnation of opinion undisturbed, but with the ecclesiastics and ministers whose tyranny made dissimulation necessary. And the veil imposed by authority did not really serve any purpose of concealment. Every reader was let into the secret of the writer's true opinion of the old mysteries by means of a piquant phrase, an adroit parallel, a significant reference, an equivocal word of dubious panegyric. Diderot openly explains this in the pages of the Encyclopædia itself. 'In all cases,' he says, 'where a national prejudice would seem to deserve respect, the particular article ought to set it respectfully forth, with its whole procession of attractions and probabilities. But the edifice of mud ought to be overthrown and an unprofitable heap of dust scattered to the wind, by references to articles in which solid principles serve as a base for the opposite truths. This way of undeceiving men operates promptly on minds of the right stamp, and it operates infallibly and without any troublesome consequences, secretly and without disturbance, on minds of every description.'[2] 'Our

[1] July 21, 1757.

[2] Article *Encyclopédie*.

fanatics feel the blows,' cried D'Alembert complacently, 'though they are sorely puzzled to tell from which side they come.'[1]

It is one of the most deplorable things in the history of literature to see a man endowed with Diderot's generous conceptions and high social aims, forced to stoop to these odious economies. In reading his Prospectus, and still more directly in his article, *Encyclopédie*, we are struck by the beneficence and breadth of the great designs which inspire and support him. The Encyclopædia, it has been said, was no peaceful storehouse in which scholars and thinkers of all kinds could survey the riches they had acquired; it was a gigantic siege-engine and armoury of weapons of attack.[2] This is only true in a limited sense of one part of the work, and that not the most important part. Such a judgment is only possible for one who has not studied the book itself, or else who is ignorant of the social requirements of France at the time. We shall show this presently in detail. Meanwhile it is enough to make two observations. The implements which the circumstances of the time made it necessary to use as weapons of attack, were equally fitted for the acquisition in a happier season of those treasures of thought and knowledge which are the object of disinterested research. And what is still more important, we have to observe that it was the characteristic note and signal glory of the French revolutionary

[1] To Volt. Feb. 15, 1757.

[2] Hettner's *Literaturgesch. des 18ten Jahrhunderts*, ii. 277.

school to subordinate mere knowledge to the practical work of raising society up from the corruption and paralysis to which it had been brought by the double action of civil and ecclesiastical authority. The efforts of the Encyclopædists were not disinterested in the sense of being vague blows in the air. Their aim was not theory but practice, not literature but life. The Encyclopædists were no doubt all men of battle, and some of them were hardly more than mere partisans. But Diderot at least had constantly in mind the great work which remained after the battle should be won. He was profoundly conscious that the mere accumulation of knowledge of the directly physical facts of the universe would take men a very short way towards reconstruction. And he struck the key-note in such admirable passages as this:—'One consideration especially that we ought never to lose from sight is that, if we ever banish man, or the thinking and contemplative being, from above the surface of the earth, this pathetic and sublime spectacle of nature becomes no more than a scene of melancholy and silence. The universe is dumb; the darkness and silence of the night take possession of it. . . . It is the presence of man that gives its interest to the existence of other beings; and what better object can we set before ourselves in the history of these beings than to accept such a consideration? Why shall we not introduce man into our work in the same place which he holds in the universe? Why shall we not make him a common centre? Is there in infinite space

any other point from which we can with greater advantage draw those immense lines that we propose to extend to all other points? What a vivid and softening reaction must result between man and the beings by whom he is surrounded? . . . Man is the single term from which we ought to set out, and to which we ought to trace all back, if we would please, interest, touch, even in the most arid reflections and the driest details. If you take away my own existence and the happiness of my fellows, of what concern to me is all the rest of nature?'[1]

In this we hear the voice of the new time, as we do in his exclamation that the perfection of an Encyclopædia is the work of centuries; centuries had to elapse before the foundations could be laid; centuries would have to elapse before its completion: '*mais à la postérité, et* À L'ÊTRE QUI NE MEURT POINT!'[2] These exalted ideas were not a substitute for arduous labour. In all that Diderot writes upon his magnificent undertaking, we are struck by his singular union of common sense with elevation, of simplicity with grasp, of suppleness with strength, of modesty with hopeful confidence. On occasions that would have tempted a man of less sincerity and less seriousness to bombast and inflation, his sense of the unavoidable imperfections of so vast a work always makes itself felt through his pride in its lofty aim and beneficent design. The weight of the burden steadied him, and

[1] Article *Encyclopédie.* [2] *Prospectus.*

the anxiety of the honest and laborious craftsman mastered the impulses of rhetoric.

Before going further into the general contents of the Encyclopædia, we shall briefly describe the extraordinary succession of obstacles and embarrassments against which its intrepid conductor was compelled to fight his way. The project was fully conceived and its details worked out between 1745 and 1748. The Encyclopædia was announced in 1750 in a Prospectus of which Diderot was the author. At length in 1751 the first volume of the work itself was given to the public, followed by the second in January, 1752. The clerical party at once discerned what tremendous fortifications, with how deadly an armament, were rising up in face of their camp. The Jesuits had always been jealous of an enterprise in which they had not been invited to take a part. They had expected at least to have the control of the articles on theology. They now were bent on taking the work into their own hands, and orthodoxy hastily set all the machinery of its ally, authority, in vigorous motion.

The first attack was indirect. An abbé de Prades sustained a certain thesis in an official exercise at the Sorbonne, and Diderot was suspected, without good reason, of being its true author. An examination of its propositions was ordered. It was pronounced pernicious, dangerous, and tending to deism, chiefly on account of some too suggestive comparisons between the miraculous healings in the New Testament, and

those ascribed in the more ancient legend to Aesculapius. Other grounds of vehement objection were found in the writer's maintenance of the Lockian theory of the origin of our ideas. To deny the innateness of ideas was roundly asserted to be materialism and atheism. The abbé de Prades was condemned, and deprived of his licence (Jan. 27, 1752). As he was known to be a friend of Diderot, and was suspected of being the writer of articles on theology in the Encyclopædia, the design of the Jesuit cabal in ruining De Prades was to discredit the new undertaking, and to induce the government to prohibit it. Their next step was to procure a pastoral from the archbishop of Paris. This document not only condemned the heretical propositions of De Prades, but referred in sombre terms to unnamed works teeming with error and impiety. Everyone understood the reference, and among its effects was an extension of the vogue and notoriety of the Encyclopædia.[1] The Jesuits were not allowed to retain a monopoly of persecuting zeal, and the Jansenists refused to be left behind in the race of hypocritical intrigue. The bishop of Auxerre, who belonged to this party, followed his brother prelate of Paris in a more direct attack, in which he included not only the Encyclopædia, but Montesquieu and Buffon. De Prades took to flight. D'Alembert commended him to Voltaire, then at Berlin. The king was absent, but Voltaire gave royal protection to the fugitive until Frederick's return. De Prades was then at once taken

[1] Barbier, v. 151, 153.

into favour and appointed reader to the king. He proved but a poor martyr, however, for he afterwards retracted his heresies, got a benefice, and was put into prison by Frederick for giving information to his French countrymen during the Seven Years' War.[1] Unfortunately neither orthodoxy nor heterodoxy has any exclusive patent for monopoly of rascals.

Meanwhile Diderot wrote on his behalf an energetic and dignified reply to the aggressive pastoral. This apology is not such a masterpiece of eloquence as the magnificent letter addressed by Rousseau ten years later to the archbishop of Paris, after the pastoral against Emilius. But Diderot's vindication of De Prades is firm, moderate, and closely argumentative. The piece is worth turning to in our own day, when great dignitaries of the churches too often show the same ignorance, the same temerity, and the same reckless want of charity, as the bishop of Auxerre showed a hundred and twenty years ago. They resort to the very same fallacies by way of shield against scientific truths or philosophical speculations that happen not to be easily reconcilable with their official opinions. 'I know nothing so indecent,' says Diderot, 'and nothing so injurious to religion as these vague declamations of theologians against reason. One would suppose, to hear them, that men could only enter into the bosom of Christianity as a herd of cattle enter into a stable; and that we must renounce our

[1] Diderot to Voland, *Œuv.* xviii. 361. Carlyle's *Frederick*, Bk. 18, Ch. 11.

common sense, either to embrace our religion or to remain in it. . . . . Such principles as yours are made to frighten small souls; everything alarms them, because they perceive clearly the consequences of nothing; they set up connections among things which have nothing to do with one another; they spy danger in any method of arguing which is strange to them; they float at hazard between truths and prejudices which they never distinguish, and to which they are equally attached; and all their life is passed in crying out either miracle or impiety.' In an eloquent peroration, which is not more eloquent than it is instructive, De Prades is made to turn round on his Jansenist censor, and reproach him with the disturbance with which the intestine rivalries of Jansenist and Jesuit had afflicted the faithful. 'It is the abominable testimony of your convulsions,' he cries, 'that has overthrown the testimony of miracles. It is the fatuous audacity with which your fanatics have confronted persecution that has annihilated the evidence of the martyrs. It is your declamations against sovereign pontiffs, against bishops, against all the orders of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, that have covered priest, altar, and creed with opprobrium. If the pope, the bishops, the priests, the simple faithful, the whole church, if its mysteries, its sacraments, its temples, its ceremonies, have fallen into contempt, yours, yours, is the handiwork.'[1]

Bourdaloue more than half a century before had

[1] *Apologie de l'Abbé de Prades.* *Œuv.* i. 482.

taunted the free-thinkers of his day with falseness and inconsistency in taking sides with the Jansenists, whose superstitions they notoriously held in open contempt. The motive for the alliance was tolerably obvious. The Jansenists, apart from their theology, were above all else the representatives of opposition to authority. It was for this that Lewis XIV. counted them worse than atheists. The Jesuits, it has been well said, in keeping down their enemies by force, became the partisans of absolute government, and upheld it on every occasion. The Jansenists, after they had been crushed by violence, began to feel to what excesses power might be brought. From being speculative enemies to freedom as a theory, they became, through the education of persecution, the partisans of freedom in practice. The quarrel of Molinists and Jansenists, from a question of theology, grew into a question of human liberty.[1]

Circumstances had now changed. The free-thinkers were becoming strong enough to represent opposition to authority on their own principles and in their own persons. Diderot's vigorous remonstrance with the bishop of Auxerre incidentally marks for us the definite rupture of philosophic sympathy for the Jansenist champions. 'It is your disputatiousness,' he said, 'which within the last forty years has made far more unbelievers than all the productions of philosophy.' As we cannot too clearly realise, it was the flagrant social incompetence of the church which brought what

[1] See Jobez, i. 358.

they called Philosophy, that is to say Liberalism, into vogue and power. Locke's Essay had been translated in 1700, but it had made no mark, and as late as 1725 the first edition of the translation remained unsold. It was the weakness and unsightly decrepitude of the ecclesiastics which opened the way for the thinkers.

The victory however was not yet. Diderot had still a dismal wilderness to traverse. He was not without secret friends even in the camp of his enemies. After his reply to Père Berthier's attack on the Prospectus, he received an anonymous letter to the effect that if he wished to avenge himself on the Jesuits, there were both important documents and money at his command. Diderot replied that he was in no want of money, and that he had no time to spare for Jesuit documents.[1] He trusted to reason. Neither reason nor eloquence availed against the credit at court of the ecclesiastical cabal. The sale of the second volume of the Encyclopædia was stopped by orders which Malesherbes was reluctantly compelled to issue. A decree of the king's council (Feb. 7, 1752) suppressed both volumes, as containing maxims hostile to the royal authority and to religion. The publishers were forbidden to reprint them, and the booksellers were forbidden to deliver any copies that might still be in hand. The decree, however, contained no prohibition of the continuance of the work. It was probably not meant to do anything more serious than pacify the Jesuits, and lend an apparent justification to the officious pastorals

[1] xix. 425.

of the great prelates. Some even thought that the aim of the government was to forestal severer proceedings on the part of the parliament of lawyers;[1] for corporations of lawyers have seldom been less bigoted or obstructive than corporations of churchmen. Nor were lawyers and priests the only foes. Even the base and despicable jealousies of booksellers counted for something in the storm.[2]

A curious triumph awaited the harassed Diderot. He was compelled, under pain of a second incarceration, to hand over to the authorities all the papers, proof-sheets, and plates in his possession. The Jesuit cabal supposed that if they could obtain the materials for the future volumes, they could easily arrange and manipulate them to suit their own purposes. Their ignorance and presumption were speedily confounded. In taking Diderot's papers, they had forgotten, as Grimm says, to take his head and his genius: they had forgotten to ask him for a key to articles which, so far from understanding, they with some confusion vainly strove even to decipher. The government was obliged (May, 1752) to appeal to Diderot and D'Alembert to resume a work for which their enemies had thus proved themselves incompetent. Yet, by one of the meannesses of decaying authority, the decree of three months before was left suspended over their heads.

The third volume of the Encyclopædia appeared in

[1] Barbier, v. 160. [2] Barbier, v. 169.
[3] Grimm, *Corr. Lit.*, i. 81. Barbier, v. 170.

the autumn of 1753. D'Alembert prefixed an introduction, vindicating himself and his colleague with a manliness, a sincerity, a gravity, a fire, that are admirable and touching. 'What,' he concluded, 'can malignity henceforth devise against two men of letters, trained long since by their meditations to fear neither injustice nor poverty; who having learnt by a long and mournful experience, not to despise, but to mistrust and dread men, have the courage to love them, and the prudence to flee them? . . . After having been the stormy and painful occupation of the most precious years of our life, this work will perhaps be the solace of its close. May it, when both we and our enemies alike have ceased to exist, be a durable monument of the good intention of the one, and the injustice of the other. . . . Let us remember the fable of Bocalini: "A traveller was disturbed by the importunate chirrupings of the grasshoppers; he would fain have slain them every one, but only got belated and missed his way; he need only have fared peacefully on his road, and the grasshoppers would have died of themselves before the end of a week." '[1]

A volume was now produced in each year, until the autumn of 1757 and the issue of the seventh volume. This brought the work down to Gyromancy and Gythium. Then there arose storms and divisions which marked a memorable epoch alike in the history of the book, in the life of Diderot and others, and in the thought of the century. The progress of the

[1] *Avert.* to vol. iii. *(Œuv. de D'Alembert,* iv. 410.

work in popularity during the five years between 1752 and 1757 had been steady and unbroken. The original subscribers were barely two thousand. When the fourth volume appeared, there were three thousand. The seventh volume found nearly a thousand more.[1] Such prodigious success wrought the chagrin of the party of superstition to fever heat. As each annual volume came from the press and found a wider circle of readers than its predecessor, their malice and irritation waxed a degree more intense. They scattered malignant rumours abroad; they showered pamphlets; no imputation was too odious or too ridiculous for them. Diderot, D'Alembert, Voltaire, Rousseau, Buffon, were declared to have organized a league of writers, with the deliberate purpose of attacking the public tranquillity and overthrowing society. They were denounced as heads of a formal conspiracy, a clandestine association, a midnight band, united in a horrible community of pestilent opinions and sombre interests.

In the seventh volume an article appeared which made the ferment angrier than it had ever been. D'Alembert had lately been the guest of Voltaire at Ferney, whence he had made frequent visits to Geneva. In his intercourse with the ministers of that famous city, he came to the conclusion that their religious opinions were really Socinian, and when he wrote the article on Geneva he stated this. He stated it in such a way as to make their heterodox opinions a credit to the Genevese pastors, because he associated disbelief

[1] Barbier, v. 170. Grimm, *Corr. Lit.*, i. 201; *Ib.* ii. 197.

in the divinity of Jesus Christ, in mysteries of faith, and in eternal punishment, with a practical life of admirable simplicity, purity, and tolerance. Each line of this eulogy on the Socinian preachers of Geneva, veiled a burning and contemptuous reproach against the cruel and darkened spirit of the churchmen in France. Jesuit and Jansenist, loose abbés and debauched prelates, felt the quivering of the arrow in the quick, as they read that the morals of the Genevese pastors were exemplary; that they did not pass their lives in furious disputes upon unintelligible points; that they brought no indecent and persecuting accusations against one another before the civil magistrate. There was gall and wormwood to the orthodox bigot in the harmless statement that 'Hell, which is one of the principal articles of our belief, has ceased to be one with many of the ministers of Geneva; it would be, according to them, a great insult to the divinity, to imagine that this Being, so full of justice and goodness, is capable of punishing our faults by an eternity of torment: they explain in as good a sense as they can the formal passages of scripture which are contrary to their opinion, declaring that we ought never in the sacred books to take anything literally that seems to wound humanity and reason.' And we may be sure that D'Alembert was thinking less of the consistory and the great council of Geneva, than of the priests and the parliament of Paris, when he praised the protestant pastors, not only for their tolerance, but for confining themselves within their proper

functions, and for being the first to set an example of submission to the magistrates and the laws. The intention of this elaborate and reasoned account of the creed and practice of a handful of preachers in a heretical town, could not be mistaken by those at whom it was directed. It produced in the black ranks of official orthodoxy fully as angry a shock as its writer could have designed.

The church had not yet, we must remember, borrowed the principles of humanity and tolerance from atheists. It was not the comparatively purified Christian doctrine of our own time with which the Encyclopædists did battle, but an organized corporation, with exceptional tribunals, with special material privileges, with dungeons and chains at their disposal. We have to realise that official religion was then a strange union of Byzantine decrepitude with the energetic ferocity of the Holy Office. Within five years of this indirect plea of D'Alembert for tolerance and humanity, Calas was murdered by the orthodoxy of Toulouse. Nearly ten years later (1766), we find Lewis the Fifteenth, with the steam of the Parc aux Cerfs about him, rewarded by the loyal acclamations of a Parisian crowd, for descending from his carriage as a priest passed bearing the sacrament, and prostrating himself in the mud before the holy symbol.[1] The same year the youth La Barre was first tortured, then beheaded, then burnt, for some presumed disrespect to the same holy symbol—then become the hateful

[1] Hardy, quoted by Aubertin, 407—8.

ensign of human degradation, of fanatical cruelty, of rancorous superstition. Yet I should be sorry to be unjust. It is to be said that even in these bad days when religion meant cruelty and cabal, the one or two men who boldly withstood face to face the king and the Pompadour for the vileness of their lives, were priests of the church.

D'Alembert's article hardly goes beyond what to us seem the axioms of all men of sense. We must remember the time. Even members of the philosophic party itself, like Grimm, thought the article misplaced and hardy.[1] The Genevese ministers indignantly repudiated the compliment of Socinianism, and the eulogy of being rather less irrational than their neighbours. Voltaire read and read again with delight, and plied the writer with reiterated exhortations in every key, not to allow himself to be driven from the great work by the raging of the heathen and the vain imaginings of the people.[2]

While the storm seemed to be at its height, an incident occurred which let loose a new flood of violent passion. Helvétius published that memorable book, in which he was thought to have told all the world its own secret. His *De l'Esprit* came out in 1758.[3] It provoked a general insurrection of public opinion. The devout and the heedless agreed in denouncing it as scandalous, licentious, impious, and pregnant with peril. The philosophic party felt that their ally had

[1] *Corr. Lit.*, ii. 271.

[2] To D'Alembert, Dec. 29, 1757, Jan. 1758.

[3] For a short account of Helvétius's book, see vol. ii. of the present work.

dealt a sore blow to liberty of thought and the free expression of opinion. 'Philosophy,' said Grimm, by philosophy, as I have said, meaning Liberalism, 'will long feel the effect of the rising of opinion which this author has caused by his book; and for having described too freely a morality that is bad and false in itself, M. Helvétius will have to reproach himself with all the restraints that are now sure to be imposed on the few men of lofty genius who still are left to us, whose destiny was to enlighten their fellows and to spread truth over the earth.' [1]

At the beginning of 1759 the procureur-général laid an information before the court against Helvétius's book, against half a dozen minor publications, and finally against the Encyclopædia. The *De l'Esprit* was alleged to be a mere abridgement of the Encyclopædia, and the Encyclopædia was denounced as being the opprobrium of the nation by its impious maxims and its hostility to morals and religion. The court appointed nine commissaries to examine the seven volumes, suspending their further sale or delivery in the meanwhile. When the commissaries sent in their report a month later, the parliament was dissatisfied with its tenour, and appointed four new examiners, two of them being theologians, and two of them lawyers. Before the new censors had time to do their work, the Council of State interposed with an arbitrary decree (March, 1759) suppressing the privilege which had been conceded in 1746; prohibiting

[1] *Corr. Lit.*, ii. 292—3.

the sale of the seven volumes already printed, and the printing of any future volumes under pain of exemplary punishment.[1] The motive for this intervention has never been made plain. One view is that the king's government resented the action of the law courts, and that the royal decree was only an episode in the quarrel then raging between the crown and the parliaments. Another opinion is that Malesherbes or Choiseul was anxious to please the dauphin and the Jesuit party at Versailles. The most probable explanation is that the authorities were eager to silence one at least of the three elements of opposition,—the Jansenists, the lawyers, and the philosophers,—who were then distracting the realm. The two former were beyond their direct reach. They threw themselves on the foe who happened to be most accessible.

The government, however, had no intention of finally exterminating an enemy who might at some future day happen to be a convenient ally. They encouraged or repressed the philosophers according to the political calculations of the moment, sometimes according to the caprices of the king's mistress, or even a minister's mistress. When the clergy braved the royal authority, the hardiest productions were received with indulgence. If they found themselves reduced to satisfy the clergy, then even the very commonplaces of the new philosophy became ground for accusation. The Encyclopædia was naturally exposed

[1] Barbier, vii. 125—42.

in a special degree to such alternations of favour and suspicion.[1] The crisis of 1759 furnishes a curious illustration of this. As we have seen, in the spring of that year the privilege was withdrawn from the four associated booksellers, and the continuance of the work strictly prohibited. Yet the printing was not suspended for a week. Fifty compositors were busily setting up a book which the ordinance of the government had decisively forbidden under heavy penalties. The same kind of connivance was practised to the advantage of other branches of the opposition. Thirty years before this, the organ of the Jansenist party was peremptorily suppressed. The police instituted a rigorous search, and seized the very presses on which the Nouvelles Ecclésiastiques was being printed. But the journal continued to appear and was circulated just as regularly as before.[2]

The history of the policy of authority towards the Encyclopædia is only one episode in the great lesson of the reign of Lewis the Fifteenth. It was long a common mistake to think of this king's system of government as violent and tyrannical. In truth, its failure and confusion resulted less from the arbitrariness of its procedure, than from the hopeless absence of tenacity, conviction, and consistency in the substance and direction of its objects. And this, again, was the result partly of the complex and intractable nature of the opposition with which successive ministers had to

[1] Lacretelle's *France pendant le 18me Siècle*, iii. 89.
[2] Jobez, ii. 464 and 538.

deal, and partly of the overpowering strength of those Asiatic maxims of government which Richelieu and Lewis the Fourteenth had invested with such ruinous prestige. The impatience and charlatanry of emotional or pseudo-scientific admirers of a personal system blind them to the permanent truth, of which the succession of the decrepitude of Lewis the Fifteenth to the strength of his great-grandfather, and of the decrepitude of Napoleon the Third to the strength of his uncle, are only illustrations.

The true interest of all these details about a mere book lies in the immense significance of the movement of political ideas and forces to which they belong. The true interest of all history lies in the spectacle which it furnishes of the growth and dissolution, the shock and the transformation, incessantly at work among the great groups of human conceptions. The decree against the Encyclopædia marks the central moment of a collision between two antagonistic conceptions which disputed, and in France still dispute, with one another the shaping and control of institutions. One of these ideas is the exclusion of political authority from the sphere and function of directing opinion; it implies the absolute secularisation of government. The rival idea prompted the massacre of St. Bartholomew, the dragonnades, the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, and all the other acts of the same policy, which not only deprived France of thousands of the most conscientious and most ingenious of her sons, but warped and corrupted the integrity of the national

conscience. It is natural that we should feel anger at the arbitrary attempt to arrest Diderot's courageous and enlightened undertaking. Yet in truth it was only the customary inference from an accepted principle, that it is the business or the right of governments to guide thought and regulate its expression. The Jesuits acted on this theory, and resorted to repressive power and the secular arm whenever they could. The Jansenists repudiated the principle, but eagerly acted upon it whenever the turn of intrigue gave them the chance.

An extraordinary and unforeseen circumstance changed the external bearings of this critical conflict of ideas. The conception of the duties of the temporal authority in the spiritual sphere had been associated hitherto with Catholic doctrine. The decay of that doctrine was rapidly discrediting the conception allied with it. But the movement was interrupted. And it was interrupted by a man who suddenly stepped out from the ranks of the Encyclopædists themselves. Rousseau from his solitary cottage at Montmorency (1758) fulminated the celebrated letter to D'Alembert on stage-plays. The article on Geneva in the seventh volume of the Encyclopædia had not only praised the pastors for their unbelief; it also assailed the time-honoured doctrine of the churches that the theatre is an institution from hell and an invention of devils. D'Alembert paid a compliment to his patriarch and master at Ferney, as well as shot a bolt at his ecclesiastical foes in Paris, by urging the people of Geneva

to shake off irrational prejudices and straightway to set up a playhouse. Rousseau had long been brooding over certain private grievances of his own against Diderot; the dreary story has been told by me before, and happily need not be repeated.[1] He took the occasion of D'Alembert's mischievous suggestion to his native Geneva, not merely to denounce the drama with all the force and eloquence at his command, but formally to declare the breach between himself and Diderot. From this moment he treated the Holbachians, so he contemptuously styled the Encyclopædists, as enemies of the human race and disseminators of the deadliest poisons.

This was no mere quarrel of rival authors. It marked a fundamental divergence in thought, and proclaimed the beginning of a disastrous reaction in the very heart of the school of illumination. Among the most conspicuous elements of the reaction were these: —the subordination of reason to emotion; the displacement of industry, science, energetic and many-sided ingenuity, by dreamy indolence; and finally, what brings us back to our starting-point, the suppression of opinions deemed to be anti-social by the secular arm. The old idea was brought back in a new dress; the absolutist conception of the function of authority, associated with a theistic doctrine. Unfortunately for France Rousseau's idea prospered, and ended by vanquishing its antagonist. The reason is plain. Rousseau's idea exactly fitted in with the

[1] See *Rousseau*, i. ch. 7 and 9.

political traditions and institutions of the country. It was more easily and directly compatible than was the contending idea, with that temper and set of men's minds which tradition and institutions had fixed so disastrously deep in the national character.

The crisis of 1758—9, then, is a date of the highest importance. It marks a collision between the old principle of Lewis the Fourteenth, of the Bartholomew Massacre, of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, and the new rationalistic principle of spiritual emancipation. The old principle was decrepit, it was no longer able to maintain itself; the hounds were furious, but their fury was toothless. Before the new principle could achieve mastery, Rousseau had made mastery impossible. Two men came into the world at this very moment, whom destiny made incarnations of the discordant principles. Danton and Robespierre were both born in 1759. Diderot seems to have had a biblical presentiment, says Michelet. 'We feel that he saw, beyond Rousseau, something sinister, a spectre of the future. Diderot-Danton already looks in the face of Rousseau-Robespierre.'[1]

A more vexatious incident now befel the all-daring, all-enduring Diderot, than either the decree of the council or the schism of the heresiarch at Montmorency. D'Alembert declared his intention of abandoning the work, and urged his colleague to do the same. His letters to Voltaire show intelligibly enough how he

[1] *Louis XV. et Louis XVI.*, p. 50.

brought himself to this resolution. 'I am worn out,' he says, 'with the affronts and vexations of every kind that this work draws down upon us. The hateful and even infamous satires which they print against us, and which are not only tolerated, but protected, authorised, applauded, nay actually commanded by the people with power in their hands; the sermons, or rather the tocsins that are rung against us at Versailles in the presence of the king, *nemine reclamante;* the new intolerable inquisition that they are bent on practising against the Encyclopædia, by giving us new censors who are more absurd and more intractable than could be found at Goa; all these reasons, joined to some others, drive me to give up this accursed work once for all.' He cared nothing for libels or stinging pamphlets in themselves, but libels permitted or ordered by those who could instantly have suppressed them were a different thing, especially when they vomited forth the vilest personalities. He admitted that there were other reasons why he was bent on retiring, and it would appear that one of these reasons was dissatisfaction with the financial arrangements of the booksellers.[1]

Voltaire for some time remonstrated against this retreat before the hated *Infâme.* At length his opinion came round to D'Alembert's reiterated assertions of the shame and baseness of men of letters subjecting themselves to the humiliating yoke of ministers, priests, and

[1] Jan. 11, 1758. Jan. 20, 1758. Diderot to Mdlle. Voland, October 11, 1759. See the following chapter.

police. Voltaire wrote to Diderot, protesting that before all things it was necessary to present a firm front to the foe; it would be atrocious weakness to continue the work after D'Alembert had quitted it; it was monstrous that such a genius as Diderot should make himself the slave of booksellers and the victim of fanatics. Must this dictionary, he asked, which is a hundred times more useful than Bayle's, be fettered by the superstition which it should annihilate; must they make terms with scoundrels who keep terms with none; could the enemies of reason, the persecutors of philosophers, the assassins of our kings, still dare to lift up their voices in such a century as that? 'Men are on the eve of a great revolution in the human mind, and it is you to whom they are most of all indebted for it.'[1]

More than once Voltaire entreated Diderot to finish his work in a foreign country where his hands would be free. 'No,' said Diderot in a reply of pathetic energy; 'to abandon the work is turning our back on the breach, and to do precisely what the villains who persecute us desire. If you knew with what joy they have learnt D'Alembert's desertion! It is not for us to wait until the government have punished the brigands to whom they have given us up. Is it for us to complain, when they associate with us in their insults men who are so much better than ever we shall be? What ought we to do then? Do what becomes

[1] Voltaire to D'Alembert, Jan. to May, 1758. Voltaire to Diderot, Jan. 1758.

men of courage,—despise our foes, follow them up, and take advantage, as we have done, of the feebleness of our censors. If D'Alembert resumes, and we complete our work, is not that vengeance enough? . . . . After all this, you will believe that I cling at any price to the Encyclopædia, and you will be mistaken. My dear master, I am over forty. I am tired out with tricks and shufflings. I cry from morning till night for rest, rest; and scarcely a day passes when I am not tempted to go and live in obscurity and die in peace in the depths of my old country. There comes a time when all ashes are mingled. Then what will it boot me to have been Voltaire or Diderot, or whether it is your three syllables or my three syllables that survive? One must work, one must be useful, one owes an account of one's gifts, etcetera, etcetera. Be useful to men! Is it quite clear that one does more than amuse them, and that there is much difference between the philosopher and the flute-player? They listen to one and the other with pleasure or disdain, and remain what they were. The Athenians were never wickeder than in the time of Socrates, and perhaps all that they owe to his existence is a crime the more. That there is more spleen than good sense in all this, I admit—and back I go to the Encyclopædia.'[1]

Thus for seven years the labour of conducting the vast enterprise fell upon Diderot alone. He had not only to write articles upon the most exhausting and various kinds of subjects: he had also to distribute

[1] Diderot to Voltaire, Feb. 19, 1758, xix. 452.]

topics among his writers, to shape their manuscripts, to correct proof-sheets, to supervise the preparation of the engravings, to write the text explanatory of them, and all this amid constant apprehension and alarm from the government and the police. He would have been free from persecution at Lausanne or at Leyden. The two great sovereigns of the north who thought it part of the trade of a king to patronise the new philosophy, offered him shelter at Petersburg or Berlin.[1] But how could he transport to the banks of the Neva or the Spree his fifty skilled compositors, his crafty engravers on copper-plate, and all the host of his industrial army? How could he find in those half-barbarous lands the looms and engines and thousand cunning implements and marvellous processes which he had under his eye and ready to his hand in France? And so he held fast to his post on the fifth floor of the house in the rue Saint Benoît, a standing marvel to the world of letters for all time.

As his toil was drawing to a close, he suddenly received the most mortifying of all the blows that were struck at him in the course of his prolonged, hazardous, and tormenting adventure. After the interruption in 1759, it was resolved to bring out the ten volumes which were still wanting, in a single issue. Le Breton was entrusted with the business of printing them. The manuscript was set in type, Diderot corrected the proof-sheets, saw the revises, and returned each sheet duly marked with his signature for the press. At this

[1] To Voland, *Œuv.* xix. 146.

point the nefarious operation of Le Breton began. He and his foreman took possession of the sheets, and proceeded to retrench, cut out, and suppress every passage, line, or phrase, that appeared to them to be likely to provoke clamour or the anger of the government. They thus, of their own brute authority, reduced most of the best articles to the condition of fragments mutilated and despoiled of all that had been most valuable in them. The miscreants did not even trouble themselves to secure any appearance of order or continuity in these mangled skeletons of articles. Their murderous work done, they sent the pages to the press, and to make the mischief beyond remedy, they committed all the original manuscripts and proof-sheets to the flames. One day, when the printing was nearly completed (1764), Diderot having occasion to consult an article under the letter S, found it entirely spoiled. He stood confounded. An instant's thought revealed the printer's atrocity. He eagerly turned to the articles on which he and his subordinates had taken most pains, and found everywhere the same ravage and disorder. 'The discovery,' says Grimm, 'threw him into a state of frenzy and despair which I shall never forget.'[1] He wept tears of rage and torment in the presence of the criminal himself, and before wife and children and sympathising domestics. For weeks he could neither eat nor sleep. 'For years,' he cried to Le Breton, 'you have been basely cheating me. You have massacred, or got a brute

[1] *Corr. Lit.*, vii. 146.

beast to massacre, the work of twenty good men who have devoted to you their time, their talents, their vigils, from love of right and truth, from the simple hope of seeing their ideas given to the public, and reaping from them a little consideration richly earned, which your injustice and thanklessness have now stolen from them for ever. . . . . You and your book will be trailed through the mud; you will henceforth be cited as a man who has been guilty of an act of treachery, an act of vile hardihood, to which nothing that has ever happened in this world can be compared. Then you will be able to judge your panic terror, and the cowardly counsels of those barbarous Ostrogoths and stupid Vandals who helped you in the havoc you have made.'[1]

Yet he remained undaunted to the very last. His first movement to throw up the work, and denounce Le Breton's outrage to the subscribers and the world, was controlled. His labour had lost its charm. The monument was disfigured and defaced. He never forgot the horrible chagrin, and he never forgave the ignoble author of it. But the last stone was at length laid. In 1765 the subscribers received the concluding ten volumes of letter-press. The eleven volumes of plates were not completed until 1772. The copies bore Neufchâtel on the title-page, and were distributed privately. The clergy in their assembly at once levelled a decree at the new book. The parliament quashed this, not from love of the book, but from hatred

[1] *Corr. Lit.*, vii. 146.

of the clergy. The government, however, ordered all who possessed the Encyclopædia to deliver it over forthwith to the police. Eventually the copies were returned to their owners with some petty curtailments.

Voltaire has left us a vivacious picture of authority in grave consultation over the great engine of destruction. With that we may conclude our account of its strange eventful history.

'A servant of Lewis XV. told me that one day the king his master supping at Trianon with a small party, the talk happened to turn first upon the chase, and next on gunpowder. Some one said that the best powder was made of equal parts of saltpetre, of sulphur, and of charcoal. The Duke de la Vallière, better informed, maintained that to make good gunpowder you required one part of sulphur and one of charcoal to five parts of saltpetre.

'"It is curious," said the Duke de Nivernois, "that we should amuse ourselves every day in killing partridges at Versailles, and sometimes in killing men or getting ourselves killed on the frontier, without knowing exactly how the killing is done."

'"Alas," said Madame de Pompadour, "we are all reduced to that about everything in the world: I don't know how they compound the rouge that I put on my cheeks, and I should be vastly puzzled if they were to ask me how they make my silk stockings.'

'"'Tis a pity, then," said the Duke de la Vallière, "that his Majesty should have confiscated our Encyclopædias, which cost us a hundred pistoles apiece: we should soon find there an answer to all our difficulties."

'The king justified the confiscation: he had been warned that the one and twenty folios, that were to be found on the dressing-tables of all the ladies, were the most dangerous thing in all the world for the kingdom of France; and he meant to find out for himself whether this were true or not, before letting people read the book. When supper was over, he sent three lackeys for the

book, and they returned each with a good deal of difficulty carrying seven volumes.

'It was then seen from the article *Powder* that the Duke de la Vallière was right; and then Madame de Pompadour learnt the difference between the old rouge of Spain, with which the ladies of Madrid coloured their faces, and the rouge of the ladies of Paris. She knew that the Greek and Roman ladies were painted with the purple that came from the *murex*, and that therefore our scarlet is the purple of the ancients; that there was more saffron in the rouge of Spain, and more cochineal in that of France.

'She saw how they made her stockings by loom; and the machine transported her with amazement.

'Everyone threw himself on the volumes like the daughters of Lycomedes on the ornaments of Ulysses; everyone immediately found all he sought. Those who were at law were surprised to see their affair decided. The king read all about the rights of his crown. "But upon my word," he said, "I can't tell why they spoke so ill of this book." "Do you not see, sire," said the Duke de Nivernois, "it is because the book is so good; people never cry out against what is mediocre or common in anything. If women seek to throw ridicule on a new arrival, she is sure to be prettier than they are."

'All this time they kept on turning over the leaves; and the Count de C—— said aloud—"Sire, how happy you are, that under your reign men should be found capable of understanding all the arts and transmitting them to posterity. Everything is here, from the way to make a pin down to the art of casting and pointing your guns; from the infinitely little up to the infinitely great. Thank God for having brought into the world in your kingdom the men who have done such good work for the whole universe. Other nations must either buy the Encyclopædia, or else they must pirate it. Take all my property if you will, but give me back my Encyclopædia."

'"Yet they say," replied the king, "that there are many faults in this work, necessary and admirable as it is."

'"Sire," said the Count de C——, "there were at your supper two ragouts which were failures; we left them uneaten, and yet we had excellent cheer. Would you have had them throw all the supper out of the window because of those two ragouts? . . ."

'Envy and Ignorance did not count themselves beaten; the two immortal sisters continued their cries, their cabals, their persecutions. What happened? Foreigners brought out four editions of this French book which in France was proscribed, and they gained about 1,800,000 crowns.'[1]

In a monotonous world it is a pity to spoil a striking effect, yet one must be vigilant. It has escaped the attention of writers who have reproduced this lively scene, that Madame de Pompadour was dead before the volumes containing Powder and Rouge were born. The twenty-one volumes were not published until 1765, and she died in the spring of the previous year. But the substance of the story is probably true, though Voltaire has only made a slip in a name.

As to the reference with which Voltaire impatiently concludes, we have to remember that the work was being printed at Geneva as it came out in Paris. It was afterwards reprinted as a whole both at Geneva (1777) and at Lausanne (1778). An edition appeared at Leghorn in 1770, and another at Lucca in 1771. Immediately after the completion of the Encyclopædia there began to appear volumes of selections from it. The compilers of these anthologies (for instance of an *Esprit de l'Encyclopédie* published at Geneva in 1768) were free from all intention of proselytising. They

[1] *Œuv. de Voltaire.* Published sometimes among *Facéties*, sometimes among *Mélanges.*

meant only to turn a more or less honest penny by serving up in neat duodecimos the liveliest, most curious, and most amusing pieces to be found in the immense mass of the folios of the original.

The Encyclopædia of Diderot, though not itself the most prodigious achievement on which French booksellers may pride themselves, yet inspired that achievement. In 1782 Panckoucke—a familiar name in the correspondence of Voltaire and the Voltairean family—conceived the plan of a Methodical Encyclopædia. This colossal work, which really consists of a collection of special cyclopædias for each of the special sciences was not completed until 1832, and comprises one hundred and sixty-six volumes of text, with a score more volumes of plates. It has no unity of doctrine, no equal application of any one set of philosophic principles, and no definite social aim. The only encyclopædia since 1772 with which I am acquainted, that is planned with a view to the presentation of a general body of doctrine, is the unfinished Encyclopédie Nouvelle of Pierre Leroux and Jean Reynaud. This work was intended to apply the socialistic and spiritualistic ideas of its authors over the whole field of knowledge and speculation. The result is that it furnishes only a series of dissertations, and is not an encyclopædia in the ordinary sense.[1]

The booksellers at first spoke of the Encyclopædia

[1] See *Œuv. Choisies de Jean Reynaud*, reprinted in 1866. The article on *Encyclopédie* (vol. i.) is an interesting attempt to vindicate Cartesian principles of classification.

as an affair of two million livres. It appeared, however, that its cost did not go much beyond one million, one hundred and forty thousand livres. The gross return was calculated to be nearly twice as much. The price to the subscriber of the seven volumes up to 1757, of the ten volumes issued in 1765, and of the eleven volumes of plates completed in 1772, amounted to nine hundred and eighty livres,[1] or about forty-three pounds sterling of that date, equivalent in value to more than three times the sum in money of to-day.

The payment received by Diderot is a little doubtful, and the terms were evidently changed from time to time. His average salary, after D'Alembert had quitted him, seems to have amounted to about three thousand livres, or one hundred and thirty pounds sterling, per annum. This coincides with Grimm's statement that the total sum received by Diderot was sixty thousand livres, or about two thousand six hundred pounds sterling.[2] And to think, cried Voltaire, when he heard of Diderot's humble wage, that an army contractor makes twenty thousand livres a day! Voltaire himself had made a profit of more than half a million livres by a share in an army contract in the war of 1734, and his yearly income derived from such gains and their prudent investment was as high as seventy thousand livres, representing in value a sum not far short of ten thousand pounds a year of our present money.

[1] See fly-leaf of vol. xxviii. [2] *Mém.* ii. 115. Grimm, vii. 145.

II.

All writers on the movement of illumination in France in the eighteenth century, call our attention to the quick transformation, which took place after the middle of the century, of a speculative or philosophical agitation into a political or social one. Readers often find some difficulty in understanding plainly how or why this metamorphosis was brought about. The metaphysical question which men were then so fond of discussing, whether matter can think, appears very far removed indeed from the sphere of political conceptions. The psychological question whether our ideas are innate, or are solely given to us by experience through the sensations, may strike the publicist as having the least possible to do with the type of a government or the aims of a community. Yet it is really the conclusions to which men come in this region, that determine the quality of the civil sentiment and the significance of political organization. The theological doctors who persecuted De Prades for suggestions of Locke's psychology, and for high treason against Cartesianism, were guided by a right instinct of self-preservation. De Maistre, by far the most acute and penetrating of the Catholic school, was never more clear-sighted than when he made a vigorous and deliberate onslaught upon Bacon the centre of his movement against revolutionary principles.[1]

[1] De Maistre says that the reputation of Bacon does not really go further back than the Encyclopædia, and that no true discoverer either knew him or

As we have said before, the immediate force of speculative literature hangs on practical opportuneness. It was not merely because Bacon and Hobbes and Locke had written certain books, that the Encyclopædists, who took up their philosophic succession, inevitably became a powerful political party and multiplied their adherents in an increasing proportion as the years went on. From various circumstances the attack acquired a significance and a weight in France which it had never possessed in England. For one thing, physical science had in the interval taken immense strides. This both dwarfed the sovereignty of theology and theological metaphysics, and indirectly disposed men's minds for non-theological theories of moral as well as of physical phenomena. In France, again, the objects of the attack were inelastic and unyielding. Political speculation in England followed, and did not precede, political innovation and reform. In France its light played round institutions which were too deeply rooted in absolutism and privilege to be capable of substantial modification.

leaned on him for support. (*Examen de la Phil. de Bacon*, ii. 110). Diderot says:—'I think I have taught my fellow-citizens to esteem and read Bacon; people have turned over the pages of this profound author more since the last five or six years than has ever been the case before.' (xiv. 494). In Professor Fowler's careful and elaborate edition of the Novum Organum (*Introduct.*, p. 104), he disputes the statement of Montucla and others, that the celebrity of Bacon dates from the Encyclopædia. All turns upon what we mean by celebrity. What the Encyclopædists certainly did was to raise Bacon, for a time, to the popular throne from which Voltaire's Newtonianism had pushed Descartes. Mr. Fowler traces a chain of Baconian tradition, no doubt, but he perhaps surrenders nearly as much as is claimed when he admits that 'the patronage of Voltaire and the Encyclopædists did much to extend the study of Bacon's writings, besides producing a considerable controversy as to his true meaning on many questions of philosophy and theology.'

Deism was comparatively impotent against the church of England, first, because it was an intellectual movement, and not a social one; second, because the constitutional doctrines of the church were flexible. Deism in the hands of its French propagators became connected with social liberalism, because the Catholic church in those days was identified with all the ideas of repression. And the tendencies of deism in France grew more violently destructive, not only because religious superstition was grosser, but because that superstition was incorporated in a strong and inexpansible social structure.

'It would be a mistake,' wrote that sagacious and well-informed observer, D'Argenson, so early as 1753, 'to attribute the loss of religion in France to the English philosophy, which has not gained more than a hundred philosophers or so in Paris, instead of setting it down to the hatred against the priests, which goes to the very last extreme. All minds are turning to discontent and disobedience, and everything is on the high road to a great revolution both in religion and in government. And it will be a very different thing to that rude Reformation, a medley of superstition and freedom, which came to us from Germany in the sixteenth century! As our nation and our century are enlightened in so very different a fashion, they will go whither they ought to go; they will banish every priest, all priesthood, all revelation, all mystery.' This, however, only represents the destructive side of the vast change which D'Argenson

thus foresaw six-and-thirty years before its consummation. That change had also a constructive side. If one of its elements was hate, another and more important element was hope. This constructive and reforming spirit which made its way in the intelligence of the leading men in France from 1750 to 1789, was represented in the encyclopædic confederation, and embodied in their forty folios. And, to return to our first point, it was directly and inseparably associated with the philosophy of Bacon and Locke. What is the connection between their speculations and a vehement and energetic spirit of social reform? We have no space here to do more than barely hint the line of answer.

The broad features of the speculative revolution of which the Encyclopædia was the outcome, lie on the surface of its pages and cannot be mistaken. The transition from Descartes to Newton meant the definite substitution of observation for hypothesis. The exaltation of Bacon meant the advance from supernatural explanations to explanations from experience. The acceptance and development of the Lockian psychology meant the reference of our ideas to bodily sensations, and led men by what they thought a tolerably direct path to the identification of mind with functions of matter. We need not here discuss the philosophical truth or adequateness of these ways of considering the origin and nature of knowledge, or the composition of human character. All that now concerns us is to mark their tendency. That tendency

clearly is to expel Magic as the decisive influence among us, in favour of ordered relations of cause and effect, only to be discovered by intelligent search. The universe began to be more directly conceived as a group of phenomena that are capable of rational and connected explanation. Then, the wider the area of law, the greater is man's consciousness of his power of controlling forces, and securing the results that he desires. Objective interests and their conditions acquire an increasing preponderance in his mind. On the other hand, as the limits of science expand, so do the limits of nescience become more definite. The more we know of the universal order, the more are we persuaded, however gradually and insensibly, that certain matters which men believed themselves to know outside of this phenomenal order, are in truth inaccessible by those instruments of experience and observation to which we are indebted for other knowledge. Hence, a natural inclination to devote our faculty to the forces within our control, and to withdraw it from vain industry about forces,—if they be forces,—which are beyond our control and beyond our apprehension. Thus man becomes the centre of the world to himself, nature his servant and minister, human society the field of his interests and his exertions. The sensational psychology, again, whether scientifically defensible or not, clearly tends to heighten our idea of the power of education and institutions upon character. The more vividly we realise the share of external impressions in making men what

they are, the more ready we shall be to concern ourselves with external conditions and their improvement. The introduction of the positive spirit into the observation of the facts of society was not to be expected until the Cartesian philosophy, with its reliance on inexplicable intuitions and its exaggeration of the method of hypothesis, had been laid aside.

Diderot struck a key-note of difference between the old Catholic spirit and the new social spirit, between quietist superstition and energetic science, in the casual sentence in his article on alms-houses and hospitals:—'*It would be far more important to work at the prevention of misery, than to multiply places of refuge for the miserable.*'

It is very easy to show that the Encyclopædists had not established an impregnable scientific basis for their philosophy. Anybody can now see that their metaphysic and psychology were imperfectly thought out. The important thing is that their metaphysic and psychology were calculated, notwithstanding all their superficialities, to inspire an energetic social spirit, because they were pregnant with humanistic sentiment. To represent the Encyclopædia as the gospel of negation and denial is to omit four-fifths of its contents. Men may certainly, if they please, describe it as merely negative work, for example, to denounce such institutions as examination and punishment by Torture (see *Question*, *Peine*), but if so, what gospel of affirmation can bring better blessings?[1] If the

[1] See above, p. 59, *note*.

metaphysic of these writers had been a thousandfold more superficial than it was, what mattered that, so long as they had vision for every one of the great social improvements on which the progress and even the very life of the nation depended? It would be obviously unfair to say that reasoned interest in social improvement is incompatible with a spiritualistic doctrine, but we are justified in saying that, as a matter of fact, energetic faith in possibilities of social progress has been first reached through the philosophy of sensation and experience.

In describing the encyclopædic movement as being, among other things, the development of political interest under the presiding influence of a humanistic philosophy, we are using the name of politics in its widest sense. The economic conditions of a country, and the administration of its laws, are far more vitally related to its well-being than the form of its government. The form of government is indeed a question of the first importance, but then this is owing in a paramount degree to the influence which it may have upon the other two sets of elements in the national life. Form of government is like the fashion of a man's clothes; it may fret or may comfort him, may be imposing or mean, may react upon his spirits to elate or depress them. In either case it is less intimately related to his welfare than the state of his blood and tissues. In saying, then, that the Encyclopædists began a political work, what is meant is that

they drew into the light of new ideas, groups of institutions, usages, and arrangements which affected the real wellbeing and happiness of France, as closely as nutrition affected the health and strength of an individual Frenchman. It was the Encyclopædists who first stirred opinion in France against the iniquities of colonial tyranny and the abominations of the slave trade. They demonstrated the folly and wastefulness and cruelty of a fiscal system that was eating the life out of the land. They protested in season and out of season against arrangements which made the administration of justice a matter of sale and purchase. They lifted up a strong voice against the atrocious barbarities of an antiquated penal code. It was this band of writers, organized by a harassed man of letters, and not the nobles swarming round Lewis the Fifteenth, nor the churchmen singing masses, who first grasped the great principle of modern society, the honour that is owed to productive industry. They were vehement for the glories of peace, and passionate against the brazen glories of war.[1]

We are not to suppose that the Encyclopædia was the originating organ of either new methods or new social ideas. The exalted and peculiarly modern views about peace, for instance, were plainly inspired from the writings of the Abbé Saint Pierre (1658-1743),

[1] D'Alembert was not afraid to contend against the great captain of the age, that the military spirit of Lewis XIV. had been a great curse to Europe. He showed a true appreciation of Frederick's character and conception of his duties as a ruler, in believing that the King of Prussia would rather have had a hundred thousand labourers more, and as many soldiers fewer, if his situation had allowed it. *Corresp. avec le roi de Prusse, Œuv.* v. 305.

—one of the most original spirits of the century, who deserves to be remembered among other good services as the inventor of the word *bienfaisance.* Again, in the mass of the political articles we feel the immense impulse that was given to sociological discussion by the Esprit des Lois. Few questions are debated here which Montesquieu had not raised, and none are debated without reference to Montesquieu's line of argument. The change of which we are conscious in turning from the Esprit des Lois to the Encyclopædia is that political ideas have been grasped as instruments. Philosophy has become patriotism. The Encyclopædists advanced with grave solicitude to the consideration of evils, to which the red-heeled parasites of Versailles were insolently and incorrigibly blind.

The articles on Agriculture, for example, are admirable alike for the fulness and precision with which they expose the actual state of France; for the clearness with which they trace its deplorable inadequateness back to the true sources; and for the strong interest and sympathy in the subject, which they both exhibit and inspire. If now and again the touch is too idyllic, it was still a prodigious gain to let the country know in a definite way that of the fifty million arpents of cultivable land in the realm, more than one quarter lay either unbroken or abandoned. And it was a prodigious gain to arouse the attention of the general public to the causes of the forced deterioration of French agriculture, namely, the restrictions on trade in grain, the arbitrariness of the imposts, and the

flight of the population to the large towns. Then the demonstration, corroborated in the pages of the Encyclopædia by the too patriotic vaunts of contemporary English writers, of the stimulus given to agriculture by our system of free exports, contained one of the most useful lessons that the French had to learn.

Again, there are some abuses which cannot be more effectively attacked than by a mere statement of the facts in the plainest and least argumentative terms. The history of such an impost as the tax upon salt (*Gabelle*), and a bold outline of the random and incongruous fashions in which it was levied, were equivalent to a formal indictment. It needed no rhetoric nor discussion to heighten the harsh injustice of the rule that 'persons who have changed domicile are still taxed for a certain time in the seat of their former abode, namely farmers and labourers for one year, and all other tax-payers for two years, provided the parish to which they have removed is within the same district; and if otherwise, then farmers to pay for two years, and other persons for three years' (*Taille*). Thus a man under the given circumstances would have to pay double taxes for three years, as a penalty for changing his dwelling. We already hear the murmur of the *cahiers* of five-and-twenty years later in the account of the transports of joy with which the citizens of Lisieux saw the *taille proportionelle* established (1718), and how numerous other cities sent up prayers that the same blessing might be sent up to them.[1]

[1] See Essay on Turgot in my *Critical Miscellanies, Second Series*, p. 201.

'Reasons that it is not for us to divine, caused the rejection of these demands; so hard is it to do a good act, which everybody talks about much more in order to seem to desire it, than from any intention of really doing it. . . To illustrate the advantages of this plan, the impost of 1718 with all arrears for five years was discharged in twelve months without needless cost or dispute. By an extravagance more proper than any other to degrade humanity, the common happiness made malcontents of all that class whose prosperity depends on the misery of others,'—that is the privileged class.

It is no innate factiousness, as flighty critics of French affairs sometimes imply, that has made civil equality the passion of modern France. The root of this passion is an undying memory of the curse that was inflicted on its citizens, morally and materially, by the fiscal inequalities of the old régime. The article, *Privilége,* urges the desirableness of inquiring into the grounds of the vast multitude of fiscal exemptions, and of abolishing all that were no longer associated with the performance of real and useful service. 'A bourgeois,' says the writer, anticipating a cry that was so soon to ring through the land, 'a bourgeois in comfortable circumstances, and who could himself pay half of the taille of a whole parish, if it were imposed in its due proportion,—on payment of the amount of his taxes for one or for two years, and often for less; without birth, education, or talents, buys a place in a local salt office, or some useless charge at court, or

in the household of some prince. . . . This man proceeds to enjoy in the public eye all the exemptions possessed by the nobility and the high magistracy. . . From such an abuse of privileges spring two very considerable evils; the poorer part of the citizens are always burdened beyond their strength, though they are the most useful to the State, since this class is composed of those who cultivate the land, and procure a subsistence for the upper classes; the other evil is that privileges disgust persons of education and talent with the idea of entering the magistracy or other professions demanding labour and application, and lead them to prefer small posts and paltry offices.' And so forth, with a gravity and moderation, that was then common in political discussion in France. It gradually disappeared by 1789, when it was found that the privileged orders even at that time in their *cahiers* steadily demanded the maintenance of every one of their most odious and iniquitous rights.[1] When it is said, then, that the Encyclopædists deliberately prepared the way for a political revolution, let us remember that what they really did was to shed the light of rational discussion on such practical grievances as even the most fatuous conservative in France does not now dream of bringing back.

Let us turn to two other of the most oppressive

[1] Such as that their feudal rights should be confirmed; that none but nobles should carry arms, or be eligible for the army; that *lettres-de-cachet* should continue; that the press should not be free; that the wine trade should not be free internally or for export; that breaking up wastes and enclosing commons should be prohibited; that the old arrangement of the militia should remain.—Arthur Young's *France*, ch. xxi. p. 607.

institutions that then scourged France. First the *Corvée*, or feudal rule which forced every unprivileged farmer and peasant in France to furnish so many days' labour for the maintenance of the highways. Arthur Young tells us, and the statement is confirmed by the Minutes of Turgot, that this wasteful, cruel, and inefficient system was annually the ruin of many hundreds of persons, and he mentions that no less than three hundred farmers were reduced to beggary in filling up a single vale in Lorraine.[1] Under this all-important head, the Encyclopædia has an article that does not merely add to the knowledge of its readers by a history of the *corvées*, but proceeds to discuss, as in a pamphlet or review article, the inconveniences of the prevailing system, and presses schemes for avoiding them. Turgot had not yet shown in practice the only right substitute. The article was printed in 1754, and it was not until ten years later that this great administrator, then become intendant of the Limousin, did away in his district with compulsory personal service on the roads, and required in its place a money payment assessed on the parishes.[2] The writer of the article in the Encyclopædia does not anticipate this obviously rational plan, but he paints a striking picture of the thousand abuses and miserable inefficiencies of the practice of *corvées*, and his piece illustrates that vigorous discussion of social subjects which the Encyclopædia stimulated. It is worth remarking that this writer was a sub-engineer of roads and bridges in

[1] *Travels in France*, ch. xxi.
[2] *Critical Miscellanies, Second Series*, 202.

the generality of Tours. The case is one example among others of the importance of the Encyclopædia as a centre to which active-minded men of all kinds might bring the fruits of their thought and observation.

Next to the *corvées*, the monster grievance of the third estate was the system of enrolments for the militia. The article, *Milice*, is very short, but it goes to the root of the matter. The only son of a cultivator of moderate means, forced to quit the paternal roof at the moment when his labour might recompense his straitened parents for the expense of having brought him up, is justly described as an irreparable loss. The writer, after hinting that it would be well, if such an institution were wholly dispensed with, urges that at least its object might be more effectively and more humanely reached by allowing each parish to provide its due contingent of men in its own way. This change was indeed already (1765) being carried out by Turgot in the Limousin, and with excellent results. The writer concludes with the highly civilised remark, that we ought to weigh whether the good of the rural districts, the culture of the land, and population, are not preferable objects to the glory of setting enormous hosts of armed men on foot after the example of Xerxes. Alas, it is one of the discouragements of the student of history, that he often finds highly civilised remarks made one or two or twenty centuries ago, which are just as useful and just as little heeded now as they were when they were made.

The same reflection occurs to one in reading the

article on Foundations. As I have already said, this carefully written and sagacious piece still remains the most masterly discussion that we possess of the advantages and disadvantages of endowments. Even now, and in our own country, the most fertile and beneficent work to which a statesman of energy and courage could devote himself would be an application of the wise principles which were established in the Encyclopædia. Passing from *Fondation* to *Foire* in the same volume, also from the pen of Turgot, we see an almost equally striking example of the economic wisdom of the encyclopædic school. The provincial fairs, with their privileges, exemptions, exclusions, were a conspicuous case of the mischief done by that 'mania for regulating and guiding everything,' which then infected commercial administration, and interrupted the natural course of trade by imbecile vexations of police. Another vicious example of the same principle is exposed in the article on *Maîtrises*. This must have convinced every reader capable of rising above 'the holy laws of prejudice,' how bad faith, idleness, disorder, and all the other evils of monopoly were fomented by a system of jealous trade-guilds, carrying compulsory subdivision and restriction of all kinds of skilled labour down to a degree that would have been laughable enough, if it had only been less destructive.

One of the loudest cries in 1789 was for the destruction of game and the great manorial chases or capitaineries. 'By game,' says Arthur Young, 'must

be understood whole droves of wild boars, and herds of deer not confined by any wall or pale, but wandering at pleasure over the whole country to the destruction of crops, and to the peopling of the galleys by the wretched peasants who presumed to kill them, in order to save that food which was to support their helpless children.'[1] In the same place he enumerates the outrageous and incredible rules which ruined agriculture over hundreds of leagues of country, in order that the seigneurs might have sport. In most matters the seven volumes of the Encyclopædia which were printed before 1757, are more reserved than the ten volumes which were conducted by Diderot alone after the great schism of 1759. On the subject of sport, however, the writer of the article *Chasse* enumerates all the considerations which a patriotic minister could desire to see impressed on public opinion. Some of the paragraphs startle us by their directness and freedom of complaint, and even a very cool reader would still be likely to feel some of the wrath that was stirred in the breast of our shrewd and sober Arthur Young a generation later (1787). 'Go to the residence of these great nobles,' he says, 'wherever it may be, and you would probably find them in the midst of a forest, very well peopled with deer, wild boar, and wolves. Oh! if I were the legislator of France for a day, I would make such great lords skip!'[2]

This brings us to what is perhaps the most striking

[1] *Travels in France*, p. 600.
[2] *Ibid.*, i. 63.

of all the guiding sentiments of the book. Virgil's Georgics have been described as a glorification of labour. The Encyclopædia seems inspired by the same motive, the same earnest enthusiasm for all the purposes, interests, and details of productive industry. Diderot, as has been justly said, himself the son of a cutler, might well bring handicraft into honour; assuredly he had inherited from his good father's workshop sympathy and regard for skill and labour.[1] The illustrative plates to which Diderot gave the most laborious attention for a period of almost thirty years, are not only remarkable for their copiousness, their clearness, their finish, and in all these respects they are truly admirable. But they strike us even more by the semi-poetic feeling that transforms the mere representation of a process into an animated scene of human life, stirring the sympathy and touching the imagination of the onlooker as by something dramatic. The bustle, the dexterity, the alert force of the iron foundry, the glass furnace, the gunpowder mill, the silk calendry, are as skilfully reproduced as the more tranquil toil of the dairywoman, the embroiderer, the confectioner, the setter of types, the compounder of drugs, the chaser of metals. The drawings recall that eager and personal interest in his work, that nimble complacency, which is so charming a trait in the best French craftsman. The animation of these great folios of plates is prodigious. They affect one like looking down on the world of Paris from the heights of Mont-

[1] Rosenkranz, i. 219.

martre. To turn over volume after volume is like watching a splendid panorama of all the busy life of the time. Minute care is as striking in them as their comprehensiveness. The smallest tool, the knot in a thread, the ply in a cord, the curve of wrist or finger, each has special and proper delineation. The reader smiles at a complete and elaborate set of tailor's patterns. He shudders as he comes upon the knives, the probes, the bandages, the posture, of the wretch about to undergo the most dangerous operation in surgery. In all the chief departments of industry there are plates good enough to serve for practical specifications and working drawings. It has often been told how Diderot himself used to visit the workshops, to watch the men at their toil, to put a thousand questions, to sit down at the loom, to have the machine pulled to pieces and set together again before his eyes, to slave like any apprentice, and to do bad work, in order, as he says, to be able to instruct others how to do good work. That was no movement of empty rhetoric which made him cry out for the Encyclopædia to become a sanctuary in which human knowledge might find shelter against time and revolutions. He actually took the pains to make it a complete storehouse of the arts, so perfect in detail that they could be at once reconstructed after a deluge in which everything had perished save a single copy of the Encyclopædia. Such details, said D'Alembert, will perhaps seem extremely out of place to certain scholars, for whom a long dissertation on the cookery or the hair-

dressing of the ancients, or on the site of a ruined hamlet, or on the baptismal name of some obscure writer of the tenth century, would be vastly interesting and precious. He suggests that details of economy and of arts and trades have as good a right to a place as the scholastic philosophy, or some system of rhetoric still in use, or the mysteries of heraldry. Yet none even of these had been passed over.[1]

The importance given to physical science and the practical arts in the Encyclopædia is the sign and exemplification of two elements of the great modern transition. It marks both a social and an intellectual revolution. We see in it first, the distinct association with pacific labour of honour and a kind of glory, such as had hitherto been reserved for knights and friars, for war and asceticism, for fighting and praying. It is the definite recognition of the basis of a new society. If the nobles and the churchmen could only have understood, as clearly as Diderot and D'Alembert understood, the irresistible forces that were making against the maintenance of the worn-out system, all the worst of the evils attending the great political changes of the last decade of the century would have been avoided. That the nobles and churchmen would not see this, was the fatality of the Revolution. We have a glimpse of the profound transformation of social ideas which was at work, in the five or six lines of the article, *Journalier*. 'Journeyman—a workman who labours with his hands, and is paid day-wages. This

[1] *Avert.* to vol. iii.

description of men forms the great part of a nation; it is their lot which a good government ought to keep principally in sight. If the journeyman is miserable, the nation is miserable.' And again:—'The net profit of a society, if equally distributed, may be preferable to a larger profit, if it be distributed unequally, and have the effect of dividing the people into two classes, one gorged with riches, the other perishing in misery' (*Homme*).

The second element in the modern transition is only the intellectual side of the first. It is the substitution of interest in things for interest in words, of positive knowledge for verbal disputation. Few now dispute the services of the schoolmen to the intellectual development of Europe. But conditions had fully ripened, and it was time to complete the movement of Bacon and Descartes by finally placing verbal analysis, verbal definition, verbal inferences, in their right position. Form was no longer to take precedence of matter. The Encyclopædists are never weary of contrasting their own age of practical rationalism with 'the pusillanimous ages of taste.' A great collection of books is described in one article (*Bibliomanie*) as a collection of material for the history of the blindness and infatuation of mankind. The gatherer of books is compared to one who should place five or six gems under a pile of common pebbles. If a man of sense buys a work in a dozen volumes, and finds that only half a dozen pages are worth reading, he does well to cut out the half dozen pages and fling the rest into the

fire. Finally, it would be no unbecoming device for every great library to have inscribed over its portal, The Bedlam of the Human Mind. At this point one might perhaps suggest to D'Alembert that study of the pathology of the mind is no bad means of surprising the secrets of humanity and life. For his hour, however, the need was not knowledge of the thoughts, dreams, and mental methods of the past, but better mastery of the aids and instruments of active life. In any case Diderot was right when he expressed his preference for the essay over the treatise: 'an essay where the writer throws me one or two ideas of genius, almost isolated, rather than a treatise where the precious gems are stifled beneath a mass of iteration. . . . . A man had only one idea; the idea demanded no more than a phrase; this phrase, full of marrow and meaning, would have been seized with relish; washed out in a deluge of words, it wearies and disgusts.'[1] Rousseau himself does not surpass Diderot or D'Alembert in contempt for mere bookishness. We wholly misjudge the Encyclopædia if we treat it either as literature or philosophy.

The attitude of the Encyclopædia to religion is almost universally misrepresented in the common accounts. We are always told that the aim of its conductors was to preach dogmatic atheism. Such a statement could not be made by any one who had read the theological articles, whether the more or the less

[1] Diderot, *Œuvres*, iv. 24.

important among them. Whether Diderot had himself advanced definitely to the dogma of atheism at this time or not, it is certain that the Encyclopædia represents only the phase of rationalistic scepticism. That the criticism was destructive of much of the fabric of popular belief, and was designed to destroy it, is undeniable, as it was inevitable. But when the excesses of '93 and '94—and all the revolutionary excesses put together are but a drop compared with the oceans of bloodshed with which Catholicism and absolutism have made history crimson—when the crimes and confusion of the end of the century are traced by historians to the materialism and atheism of the Encyclopædia, we can only say that such an account is a misrepresentation. The materialism and atheism are not there. The religious attack was prompted and guided by the same social feeling that inspired the economic articles. The priest was the enemy of society, the patron of indolence, the hater of knowledge, the mutineer against the civil laws, the unprofitable devourer of the national substance, the persecutor. Sacerdotalism is the object of the encyclopædic attack. To undermine this, it was necessary first to establish the principle of toleration, because the priest claims to be recognised as the exclusive possessor of saving doctrine. Second, it was necessary to destroy the principle of miracle, because the priest professes himself in his daily rites the consecrated instrument of thaumaturgy. 'Let a man,' says Rosenkranz very truly, 'turn over hundreds of histories of church, of state, of literature, and in every

one of them he will read that the Encyclopædia spread abroad an irreligious spirit. The accusation has only a relative truth, to the extent that the Encyclopædia assailed the belief in miracles, and the oppression of conscience supported by a priestly aristocracy.'[1]

It must be admitted that no consistent and definite language is adhered to from beginning to end. D'Alembert's prophecy that time would disclose to people what the writers really thought, behind what fear of the censorship compelled them to say, is only partially fulfilled.

The idea of miracle is sapped not by direct arguments, but by the indirect influences of science, and the exposition of the successes of scientific method. It was here that the Encyclopædia exerted really destructive power, and it did so in the only way in which power of that kind can be exerted either wisely or effectually. The miracle of a divine revelation, of grace, of the mass, began to wear a different look in men's eyes, as they learned more of the physical processes of the universe. We should describe the work of the Encyclopædia as being to make its readers lose their interest, rather than their belief, in mysteries. This is the normal process of theological dissolution. It unfolded a vast number of scientific conceptions in all branches of human activity, a surprising series of acquisitions, a vivid panorama of victories won by the ingenuity and travail of man. A contemplation of the wonders that man had wrought for himself, replaced

[1] *Diderot's Leben*, i. 157.

meditation on the wonders that were alleged to have been wrought by the gods. The latter were not so much denied by the plain reader, as they were gradually left out of sight and forgotten. Nobody now cares to disprove Jupiter and Juno, Satyrs and Hamadryads.

Diderot constantly insists on the propriety, the importance, the indispensableness, of keeping the provinces of science and philosophy apart from the province of theology. This separation is much sought in our own day as a means of saving theology. Diderot designed it to save philosophy. He felt that the distinct recognition of positive thought as supreme within the widest limits then covered by it, would ultimately lead to the banishment of theological thought to a region of its own, too distant and too infertile for men to weary themselves in pursuit of it. His conception was to supplant the old ways of thinking and the old objects of intellectual interest by new ones. He trusted to the intrinsic fitness and value of the new knowledge and new views of human life, to displace the old. This marks him for a constructive thinker. He replaced barren theological interests that had outlived their time, by all those great groups of living and fruitful interests which glow and sparkle in the volumes of the Encyclopædia. Here was the effective damage that the Encyclopædia inflicted on the church as the organ of a stationary superstition. Some of the articles remind us on what a strange borderland France stood in those days, between de-

basing superstition and wholesome light. We are so sensible of the new air that breathes impalpably over the book, that when the old theological fancies appear for form's sake, and are solemnly marshalled in orthodox state, the contrast and the incongruity are so marked that one is amused by what looks like a subtle irony, mocking the censor under his very eyes. Who can help smiling at the grave question, *Adam, le premier de tous les hommes, a-t-il été philosophe?* Such disputes as whether it is proper to baptize abortions, ceased to interest a public that had begun to educate itself by discussions on the virtue of Inoculation.

Of the gross defects in the execution of the Encyclopædia nobody was so sensible as Diderot himself. He drew up a truly formidable list of the departments where the work was badly done.[1] But when the blunders and omissions in each subject were all counted, the value of the vast grouping of the subjects was hardly diminished. The union of all these secular acquisitions in a single colossal work invested them with something imposing. Secular knowledge was made to present a massive and sumptuous front. It was pictured before the curious eyes of that generation as a great city of glittering palaces and stately mansions; or else as an immense landscape, with mountains, plains, rocks, waters, forests, animals, and a thousand objects, glorious and beautiful in the sunlight. Theology became visibly a shrivelled thing.

[1] *Œuv.* xx. 132.

Men grew to be conscious of the vastness of the universe. At the same time and by the same process, the Encyclopædia gave them a key to the plan, a guiding thread in the immense labyrinth. The genealogical tree, or classification of arts and sciences, which with a few modifications was borrowed from Bacon and appeared at the end of the Prospectus, is seen to be faulty and inadequate. It distributes the various branches of knowledge with reference to faculties of the human understanding, instead of grouping them according to their objective relations to one another. This led to many awkward results, as when the art of printing figures by the side of orthography as a subdivision of Logic, to which also is given the art of heraldry or emblazonment. There is awkwardness too in dividing architecture into three heads, and then placing civil architecture under national jurisprudence, and naval architecture under social jurisprudence, while under fine arts no kind of architecture has any place. But when we have multiplied these objections to the uttermost, the effect of the magnificence and vastness of the scheme remains exactly what it was.

Even more important than the exposition of human knowledge, was the exposition of the degrees by which it has been slowly reared. The Preliminary Discourse to the Encyclopædia, of which by far the greater and more valuable portion was written by D'Alembert, contains a fine survey of the progress of science, thought, and letters since the revival of learning. It

is a generous canonisation of the great heroes of secular knowledge. It is rapid, but the contributions of Bacon, Descartes, Newton, Locke, Leibnitz, are thrown into a series that penetrates the reader's mind with the idea of ordered growth and measured progress. This excited a vivid hopefulness of interest, which insensibly but most effectually pressed the sterile propositions of dogmatic theology into a dim and squalid background. Nor was this all. The Preliminary Discourse and the host of articles marshalled behind it, showed that the triumphs of knowledge and true opinion had all been gained on two conditions. The first of these conditions was a firm disregard of authority; the second was an abstention from the premature concoction of system. The reign of ignorance and prejudice was made inveterate by deference to tradition: the reign of truth was hindered by the artificial boundary-marks set mischievously deep by the authors of systems. As the whole spirit of theology is both essentially authoritative and essentially systematic, this disparagement was full of tolerably direct significance. It told in another way. The Sorbonne, the universities, the doctors, had identified orthodoxy with Cartesianism. 'It is hard to believe,' says D'Alembert in 1750, 'that it is only within the last thirty years that people have even begun to renounce Cartesianism.' He might have added that one of the most powerful of his contemporaries, Montesquieu himself, remained a rigid Cartesian to the end of his days. 'Our nation,' he says, 'singularly eager

as it is for novelties in all matters of taste, is in matters of science extremely attached to old opinions.' This remark remains true of France to the present hour, and it would be an interesting digression, did time allow, to consider its significance. France can at all events count one master innovator, the founder of Cartesianism himself. D'Alembert points out that the disciples violate the first maxims of their chief. He describes the hypothesis of vortices and the doctrine of innate ideas as no longer tenable, and even as ridiculous; but do not let us forget, he says with a fine movement of candour, that it was Descartes who opened the way; he who set an example to men of intelligence of shaking off the yoke of scholasticism, of opinion, of authority,—in a word, of prejudices and barbarism. Those who remain faithful to his hypothetical system, while they abandon his method, may be the last of his partisans, but they would assuredly never have been the first of his disciples.

By system the Encyclopædists meant more or less coherent bodies of frivolous conjecture. The true merit of the philosopher or the physicist is described as being to have the spirit of system, yet never to construct a system. The notion expressed in this sentence promises a union of the advantages of an organic synthesis, with the advantages of an open mind and unfettered inquiry. It would be ridiculous to think, says D'Alembert, that there is nothing more to discover in anatomy, because anatomists devote themselves to researches that may seem to be of no

use, and yet often prove to be full of use in their consequences. Nor would it be less absurd to lay a ban on erudition, on the pretext that our learned men often give themselves up to matters of trivial import.

We are constantly struck in the Encyclopædia by a genuine desire to reach the best opinion by the only right way, the way of abundant, many-sided, and liberal discussion. The article, for instance, on *Fermes Générales* contains an examination of the question whether it is more expedient that the taxes of a nation should be gathered by farmers of the revenue, or directly by the agents of the government acting on its behalf and under its supervision. Montesquieu had argued strongly in favour of a Régie, the second of these methods. The writer of the article sets out the nine considerations by which Montesquieu had endeavoured to establish his position, and then he offers on each of them the strongest observations that occur to him in support of the opposite conclusion. At the conclusion of the article, the editors of the Encyclopædia append the following note:—'Our professed impartiality and our desire to promote the discussion and clearing up of an important question, have induced us to insert this article. As the Encyclopædia has for its principal aim the public advantage and instruction, we will insert in the article, *Régie*, without taking any side, all such reasons for and against, as people may be willing to submit to us, provided they are stated with due sense and moderation.' Alas, when we turn to the article on Régie, the promise is unfulfilled, and

a dozen meagre lines disappoint the seeker. But eight years of storm had passed, and many a beneficent intention had been wrecked. The announcement at least shows us the aim and spirit of the original scheme.

Of the line of argument taken in the Encyclopædia as to Toleration we need say nothing. The Encyclopædists were the most ardent propagators of the modern principle of tolerance. No one has to be reminded that this was something more than an abstract discussion among the doctors of social philosophy, in a country where youths were broken on the wheel for levity in face of an ecclesiastical procession, where nearly every considerable man of the century had been either banished or imprisoned for daring to use his mind, and which had been half ruined by the great proscription of Protestants more than once renewed. The article *Tolérance* was greatly admired in its day, and it is an eloquent and earnest reproduction of the pleas of Locke. One rather curious feature in it is the reproduction of the passage from the Social Contract, in which Rousseau explains the right of the magistrate to banish any citizen who has not got religion enough to make him do his duties, and who will not make a profession of civil faith. The writer of the article interprets this as implying that 'atheists in particular, who remove from the powerful the only rein, and from the weak their only hope,' have no right to claim toleration. This is an unexpected stroke in a work that is vulgarly

supposed to be a violent manifesto on behalf of atheism.[1]

Diderot himself in an earlier article (*Intolérance*) had treated the subject with more trenchant energy. He does not argue his points systematically, but launches a series of maxims, as with set teeth, clenched hands, and a brow like a thundercloud. He hails the oppressors of his life, the priests and the parliaments, with a pungency that is exhilarating, and winds up with a description of the intolerant as one who forgets that a man is his fellow, and for holding a different opinion, treats him like a ravening brute; as one who sacrifices the spirit and precepts of his religion to his pride; as the rash fool who thinks that the arch can only be upheld by his hands; as a man who is generally without religion, and to whom it comes easier to have zeal than morals. Every page of the Encyclopædia was, in fact, a plea for toleration. This embittered the hostility of the churchmen to the work more than its attack upon dogma. For most ecclesiastics valued power more dearly than truth. And in power they valued most dearly the atrocious right of silencing, by foul means or fair, all opinions that were not official.

## III.

Having thus described the general character and

[1] The writer was one Romilly, who had been elected a minister of one of the French Protestant churches in London. See *Memoirs of Sir Samuel Romilly*, i. 65.

purport of the Encyclopædia, we have still to look at a special portion of it from a more particular point of view. We have already shown how multifarious were Diderot's labours as editor. It remains to give a short account of his labours as a contributor. Everything was on the same vast scale; his industry in writing would have been in itself most astonishing, even if it had not been accompanied by the more depressing fatigue of revising what others had written. Diderot's articles fill more than four of the large volumes of his collected works.

The confusion is immense. The spirit is sometimes historical, sometimes controversial; now critical, now dogmatic. In one place Diderot speaks in his own proper person, in another as the neutral scribe writing to the dictation of an unseen authority. There is no rigorous measure and ordered proportion. We constantly pass from a serious treatise to a sally, from an elaborate history to a caprice. There are not a few pages where we know that Diderot is saying what he does not think. Some of the articles seem only to have found a place because Diderot happened to have taken an interest in their subjects at the moment. After reading Voltaire's concise account of Imagination, we are amazed to find Diderot devoting a larger space than Voltaire had needed for the subject at large, to so subordinate and remote a branch of the matter as the Power of the Imagination in Pregnant Women upon the Unborn Young. The article on Theosophs would hardly have been so disproportionately long as

it is, merely for the sake of Paracelsus and Van Helmont and Poiret and the Rosicrucians, unless Diderot had happened to be curiously and half sympathetically brooding over the mixture of inspiration and madness, of charlatanry and generous aim, of which these semi-mystic, semi-scientific characters were composed.[1]

Many of Diderot's articles, again, have no rightful place in an Encyclopædia. *Genius*, for instance, is dealt with in what is neither more nor less than a literary essay, vigorous, suggestive, diffuse; and containing, by the way, the curious assertion that, although there are few errors in Locke and too few truths in Shaftesbury, yet Locke is only an acute and comprehensive intelligence, while Shaftesbury is a genius of the first order.

Under the word *Laborious*, we have only a dozen lines of angry reproach against the despotism that makes men idle by making property uncertain. Under such words as *Frivolous*, *Gallantry*, *Perfection*, *Importance*, *Politeness*, *Melancholy*, *Glorieux*, the reader is amused and edified by miniature essays on manners and character, seldom ending without some pithy sentence and pointed moral. Sometimes (e.g., *Grandeur*) we have a charming piece after the manner of La Bruyère. Under the verb *Naître*, which is placed in the department of grammar, we find a

[1] I have no space to quote an interesting page in this article on the characteristics and the varying destinies of genius. 'We must rank in this class Pindar, Æschylus, Moses, Jesus Christ, Mahomet, Shakespeare, Roger Bacon, and Paracelsus.'—xvii. 265—7.

passage so far removed from grammar as the following:—

'The terms of life and death have nothing absolute; they only designate the successive states of one and the same being; for him who has been strongly nourished in this philosophy, the urn that contains the ashes of a father, a mother, a husband, a mistress, is truly a touching object; there still remains in it life and warmth; these ashes may perhaps even yet feel our tears and give them response; who knows if the movement that our tears stir, as they water those ashes, is wholly without sensibility?'

This little burst of grotesque sentimentalism is one of the pieces that justify the description of Diderot as the most German of all the French.[1] Equally characteristic and more sensible is the writer's outbreak against Formalists. 'The formalist knows exactly the proper interval between receiving and returning a visit; he expects you on the exact day at the exact time; if you fail, he thinks himself neglected and takes offence. A single man of this stamp is enough to chill and embarrass a whole company. There is nothing so repugnant to simple and upright souls as formalities; as such people have within themselves the consciousness of the good-will they bear to everybody, they neither plague themselves to be constantly displaying a sentiment that is habitual,

[1] The same idea is found still more ardently expressed in one of his letters to Mdlle. de Voland (Oct. 15,1759, xviii. 408), where he defends the eagerness of those who have loved one another during life to be placed side by side after death.

nor to be constantly on the watch for it in others.' This is analogous to his contempt for the pedants who object to the use of a hybrid word :—'If it happens that a composite of a Greek word and a Latin word renders the idea as well, and is easier to pronounce or pleasanter to the ear than a compound of two Greek words and two Latin words, why prefer the latter?' (*Hibrides*). Some articles are simply diatribes against the enemy. *Pardon*, for instance :—'It needs much attention, much modesty, much skill to wring from others pardon for our superiority. The men who have executed a foolish work, have never been able to pardon us for projecting a better. We could have got from them pardon for a crime, but never for a good action.' And so forth, with much magnanimous acrimony. *Prostitution* is only introduced for the pleasure of applying the unsavoury word to certain critics 'of whom we have so many in these days, and of whom we say that they prostitute their pens to money, to favour, to lying, and to all the vices most unworthy of an honourable man.'

We are constantly being puzzled and diverted by Diderot's ingenuity in wandering away from the topic nominally in hand, to insinuate some of those doctrines of tolerance, of suspended judgment, or of liberty, which lay so much nearer to his heart than any point of mere erudition. There is a little article on Aius-Locutius, the Announcing Speaker, one of the minor Roman gods. Diderot begins by a few lines describing the rise of the deity into repute. He then

quotes Cicero's pleasantry on the friendly divinity, that when nobody in the world had ever heard of him, he delivered a salutary oracle, but after people had built him a fine temple, then the god of speech fell dumb. This suggests to Diderot to wonder with edifying innocence how so religious a people as the Romans endured these irreverent jests in their philosophers. By an easy step we pass to the conditions on which modern philosophers should be allowed by authority to publish their speculations. Diderot throws out the curious hint that it would be best to forbid any writing against government and religion in the vulgar tongue, and to allow those who write in a learned tongue to publish what they please. And so we bid farewell to Aius-Locutius. In passing, we ask ourselves whether Diderot's suggestion is not available in the discussion of certain questions, where freedom of speech in the vernacular tongue is scarcely compatible with the *reverentia quæ debetur pueris?*

Diderot is never prevented by any mistaken sense of the dignity of his enterprise from interspersing his disquisitions on science and philosophy with such practical thoughts on the common matters of daily life as come into his ingenious head. He suggests, for instance, by way of preventing the frauds of cab-drivers on their masters and on the public, that all payments of fares should be made to appointed officers at the various cab-stations, and that no driver should take up a fare except at one of these stations.[1] In

[1] xiv. 32.

writing about lackeys, after a word on their insolence and on the wretched case in which most of them end their days, he points out that the multitude of them is causing the depopulation of the fields. They are countrymen who have thronged to Paris to avoid military service. Peasants turned lackeys to escape the conscription, just as in our own days they turn priests. Then, says Diderot, this evil ought to be checked by a tax upon liveries; but such a tax is far too sensible ever to be imposed.

Yet, notwithstanding the practical and fervid temper of his understanding, Diderot is not above literary trifling when the humour seizes him. If he can write an exhaustive article on Encyclopædia, or Spinosa, or Academies, or Weaving, he can also stoop to Anagrams, and can tell us that the letters of Frère Jacques Clément, the assassin of Henry III., make up the sinister words, *C'est l'enfer qui m'a créé.* He can write a couple of amusing pages on Onomatomancy, or divination of a man's fortune from his name; and can record with neutral gravity how frequently great empires have been destroyed under princes bearing the same name as their first founders; how, again, certain names are unlucky for princes, as Caius among the Romans, John in France, England, and Scotland, and Henry in France.

We have now and then an anecdote that is worth reading and worth preserving. Thus, under Machiavellist:—'I have heard that a philosopher, being asked by a great prince about a refutation of Machi-

avellism, which the latter had just published, replied, "Sire, I fancy that the first lesson that Machiavelli would have given to his disciple, would have been to refute his work."' Whether Voltaire ever did say this to the great Frederick is very questionable, but it would not have been ill said. Again, after the reader has been taken through a short course of Arabian philosophy, he is enlivened by a selection of poetic sayings about human life from the Rosegarden of Sadi, and the whole article winds up with an eastern fable, of no particular relevancy, of three men finding a treasure, and of one of them poisoning the food for which the other two had sent him; on his return they suddenly fell on him and slew him, and then ate the poisoned food, and so the treasure fell to none of them.[1]

We have spoken in the previous section of the contempt expressed by D'Alembert for mere literary antiquarianism—a very different thing, let us remember, from scientific inquiry into the origin and classification of institutions and social organs. Diderot's article on the Germans is an excellent illustration of this wholesome predominance of the scientific spirit over the superficialities of barren erudition. The word 'Allemand,' says Diderot, 'has a great many etymologies, but they are so forced, that it is almost as well to know none of them as to know them all. As for the origin of this famous stock, all that has been said on that matter, between Tacitus and Clovis, is simply a tissue of guesses without foundation.' Of course in this, some

[1] S. v. Sarrasins, xvii. 82. See also xviii. 429, for Diderot's admiration of Sadi.

persons will see a shameful levity; others will regard it as showing very good sense, and a right estimate of what is knowable and worth knowing, and what is neither one nor the other. In the article on Celibacy we notice the same temper. A few sentences are enough for the antiquarianism of the subject, what the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans thought and ordained about celibacy. The substance of the article is a reproduction of the Abbé Saint Pierre's discussion of the advantages that would be gained for France, with her declining population, if her forty thousand curés were allowed to marry, and to bring into the world eighty thousand children. We may believe that Diderot smiled as he transcribed the Abbé's cunning suggestion that a dispensing power to relieve from the obligation of celibacy should be recognised in the Pope, and that the Roman court should receive a sum of money for every dispensation so granted.

Although, however, Diderot despised mere bookishness, his article on Libraries is one of the longest and most painstaking, furnishing a tolerably complete list of the most famous collections, from the beginning of books down to the latest additions to the King's Library in the Rue Vivienne. In the course of this article he quotes with seeming approval the quaint words in which old Richard of Bury, author of the *Philobiblon* (1340), praised books as the best of masters, much as the immortal defender of the poet Archias had praised them:—'Hi sunt magistri qui nos instruunt sine virgis et ferulis, sine cholera, sine

pecuniâ; si accedis non dormiunt; si inquiris non se abscondunt; non obmurmurant si oberres; cachinnos nesciunt si ignores.'

In literature proper, as in philosophy, Diderot loses no opportunity of insisting on the need of being content with suspended judgment. For instance, he blames historians of opinion for the readiness with which they attribute notions found in one or two rabbis to the whole of the Jews, or because two or three Fathers say something, boldly set this down as the sentiments of a whole century, although perhaps we have nothing else save these two or three Fathers left of the century, and although we do not know whether their writings were applauded, or were even widely known. 'It were to be wished that people should speak less affirmatively, especially on particular points and remote consequences, and that they should only attribute them directly to those in whose writings they are actually to be found. I confess that the history of the sentiments of antiquity would not seem so complete, and that it would be necessary to speak in terms of doubt much more often than is common; but by acting otherwise we expose ourselves to the danger of taking false and uncertain conjectures for ascertained and unquestionable truths. The ordinary man of letters does not readily put up with suspensive expressions, any more than common people do so.' All this is an odd digression to be found under the head of Hylopathianism, but it must always remain wholesome doctrine.

We cannot wonder at Diderot's admiration for Montaigne and for Bayle, who with Hume would make the great trinity of scepticism. 'The work of Montaigne,' said Diderot, 'is the touchstone of a good intelligence; you may be sure that any one whom the reading of Montaigne displeases, has some vice either of heart or understanding. As for Bayle, he has had few equals in the art of reasoning, and perhaps no superior; and though he piles doubt upon doubt, he always proceeds with order; an article of his is a living polypus, which divides itself into a number of polypuses, all living, engendered one from the other.'[1] Yet Diderot had a feeling of the necessity of advancing beyond the attitude of Bayle and Montaigne. Intellectual suspense and doubt were made difficult to him by his vehement and positive demand for emotional certainties.

Diderot is always ready to fling away his proper subject in a burst of moralising. The article on *Man*, as a branch of natural history, contains a correct if a rather superficial account of that curious animal; at length the writer comes to a table showing the probable duration of life at certain ages. 'You will observe,' he says, '1st, that the age of seven is that at which you may hope a longer life; 2nd, that at twelve or thirteen you have lived a quarter of your life; at twenty-eight or twenty-nine you have lived half; at fifty more than three quarters.' And then he suddenly winds up the whole performance by the exclamation:

[1] S. v. *Pyrrhonienne.*

—'O ye who have laboured up to fifty, who are in the enjoyment of comfort, and who still have left to you health and strength, what then are you waiting for before you take rest? How long will you go on saying *To-morrow, to-morrow.*'

There are many casual brilliancies in the way of analogy and parallel, many aptnesses of thought and phrase. The Stoics are called the Jansenists of Paganism. 'For a single blade of grass to grow, it is necessary that the whole of nature should co-operate.' 'A man comes to Pyrrhonism by one of two opposite ways; either because he does not know enough, or because he knows too much; the latter is not the most common way.' And so forth.

If we turn to the group of articles dealing with theology, it is difficult for us to know exactly where we are. Sometimes Diderot writes of popular superstitions with the gravity proper to a dictionary of mythology. Sometimes he sews on to the sober grey of his scepticism a purple patch of theistic declamation.[1] The article on Jesus Christ is obviously a mere piece of common form, and more than one passage in his article on *Christianisme* are undoubtedly insincere. When we come to his more careful article, *Providence*, we find it impossible to extract from it a body of coherent propositions, of which we could confidently say that they represented his own creed or the creed that he desired his readers to bear away in their minds.

[1] *E. g.* in the article on *Plaisir*, xvi. p. 298.

It is hardly worth while to measure the more or the less of his adherence to Christianity, or even to Deism, as inferred from the Encyclopædia. We need only turn to his private letters to find that he is in no degree nor kind an adherent, but the most hardy, contemptuous, and thoroughgoing of opponents. At the risk of shocking devout persons, I am bound to reproduce a passage from one of his letters, in which there can be no doubt that we have Diderot's true mind, as distinguished from what it was convenient to print. 'The Christian religion,' he says, 'is to my mind the most absurd and atrocious in its dogmas; the most unintelligible, the most metaphysical, the most intertwisted and obscure, and consequently the most subject to divisions, sects, schisms, heresies; the most mischievous for the public tranquillity, the most dangerous to sovereigns by its hierarchic order, its persecutions, its discipline; the most flat, the most dreary, the most Gothic, and the most gloomy in its ceremonies; the most puerile and unsociable in its morality, considered not in what is common to it with universal morality, but in what is peculiarly its own, and constitutes it evangelical, apostolical, and Christian morality, which is the most intolerant of all. Lutheranism, freed from some absurdities, is preferable to Catholicism; Protestantism to Lutheranism, Socinianism to Protestantism, Deism, with temples and ceremonies, to Socinianism. Since it is necessary that man, being superstitious by nature, should have a fetish, the simplest and most harmless

will be the best fetish.'[1] We need not discuss nor extend the quotation; enough has been said to relieve us from the duty of analysing or criticising articles in which Christianity is treated with all the formal respect that the secular authority insisted upon.

This formal respect is not incompatible with many veiled and secret sarcasms, which were as well understood as they were sharply enjoyed by those who read between the lines. It is not surprising that these sarcasms were constantly unjust and shallow. Even those of us who repudiate theology and all its works for ourselves, may feel a shock at the coarseness and impurity of innuendo which now and then disfigures Diderot's treatment of theological as of some other subjects. For this the attitude of the Church itself was much to blame; coarse, virulent, unspiritual as it was in France in those days. Voltaire, Diderot, Holbach, would have written in a very different spirit, even while maintaining and publishing the same attacks on theological opinion, if the Church of France had possessed such a school of teachers as the Church of England found in the Latitudinarians in the seventeenth century, or such as she finds now in the nineteenth century in those who have imported, partly from the poetry of Wordsworth, partly from the historic references of the Oxford Tracts, an equity, a breadth, an elevation, a pensive grace, that effectually forbid the use of those more brutal weapons of controversy which were the only weapons possible in France a century ago.

[1] To Damilaville, 1766, xix. 477.

We have already said so much of the great and important group of articles on arts and trades, that it is unnecessary to add anything further as to Diderot's particular share in them. He visited all the workshops in Paris; he sent for information and specifications to the most important seats of manufacture in the kingdom; he sometimes summoned workmen from the provinces to describe to him the paper works of Montargis, and the silk works and velvet works of Lyons.[1] Much of Diderot's work, even on great practical subjects, was, no doubt, the reproduction of mere book-knowledge acquired at second-hand. Take, for instance, Agriculture, which was undoubtedly the most important of all subjects for France at that date, as indeed at every other date. There are a dozen pages of practical precepts, for which Diderot was probably indebted to one of the farmers at Grandval. After this he fills up the article with about twenty pages in which he gives an account of the new system of husbandry, which our English Jethro Tull described to an unbelieving public between 1731 and 1751. Tull's volume was translated into French by Duhamel, with notes and the record of experiments of his own; from this volume Diderot drew the pith of his article. Diderot's only merit in the matter—and it is hardly an inconsiderable one in a world of routine—is that he should have been at the pains to seek the newest lights, and above all that he should have urged the value of fresh experiments in agriculture. Tull

[1] xx. 34.

was not the safest authority in the world, but it is to be remembered that the shrewd-witted Cobbett thought his ideas on husbandry worth reproducing seventy years after Diderot had thought them worth compiling into an article.

It was not merely in the details of the practical arts that Diderot wrote from material acquired at second-hand. The article on the Zend-Avesta is taken from the Annual Register for 1762. The long series of articles on the history of philosophy is in effect a reproduction of what he found in Bayle, in Deslandes, and in Brucker. There are one or two considerable exceptions. Perhaps the most important is under the heading of Spinosa, to which we shall return presently. The article on *Hobbisme* contains an analysis, evidently made by the writer's own hand, of the bulk of Hobbes's propositions; it is scarcely, however, illuminated by a word of criticism. If we turn to the article on *Société*, it is true, we find Hobbes's view of the relations between the civil and temporal powers tolerably effectively combated, but even here Diderot hardly does more than arm himself with the weapons of Locke.

Of course, he honestly refers his readers to these sources of wider information.[1] All that we can say of the articles on the history of philosophy is that the series is very complete; that Diderot used his matter with intelligence and the spirit of criticism, and that he often throws in luminous remarks and far-

[1] xvi. 280.

reaching suggestions of his own. This was all that the purpose of his book required. To imitate the laborious literary search of Bayle or of Brucker, and to attempt to compile an independent history of philosophy, would have been to sacrifice the Encyclopædia as a whole to the superfluous perfection of a minor part. There is only one imperative condition in such a case, namely, that the writer should pass the accepted material through his own mind before reproducing it. With this condition it was impossible for a man of Diderot's indefatigable energy of spirit not, as a rule, to comply.

But this rule too had exceptions. There were cases in which he reproduced, as any mere bookmaker might have done, the thought of his authority without an attempt to make it his own. Of the confusion and inequalities in which Diderot was landed by this method of mingling the thoughts of other people with his own, there is a curious example in the two articles on Philosopher and Philosophy. In the first we have an essentially social and practical description of what the philosopher should be; in the second we have a definition of philosophy which takes us into the regions most remote from what is social and practical. We soar to the airiest heights of verbal analysis and pure formalism. Nothing can be better, so far as it goes, than the picture of the philosopher. Diderot begins by contrasting him with the crowd of people, and clever people, who insist on passing judgments all day long. 'They ignore the scope and limits of the human

mind; they think it capable of knowing everything; hence they think it a disgrace not to pronounce judgment, and imagine that intelligence consists in that and nothing else. The philosopher believes that it consists in judging rightly. He is better pleased with himself when he has suspended his faculty of coming to a conclusion, than if he had come to a conclusion without the proper grounds. He prefers to brilliancy the pains of rightly distinguishing his ideas, of finding their true extent and exact connection. He is never so attached to a system as not to feel all the force of the objections to it. Most men are so strongly given over to their opinions, that they do not take any trouble to make out those of others. The philosopher, on the other hand, understands what he rejects, with the same breadth and the same accuracy as he understands what he adopts.' Then Diderot turns characteristically from the intellectual to the social side. 'Our philosopher does not count himself an exile in the world; he does not suppose himself in an enemy's country; he would fain find pleasure with others, and to find it he must give it; he is a worthy man who wishes to please and to make himself useful. The ordinary philosophers who meditate too much, or rather who meditate to wrong purpose, are as surly and arrogant to all the world as great people are to those whom they do not think their equals; they flee men, and men avoid them. But our philosopher who knows how to divide himself between retreat and the commerce of men is full of humanity. *Civil society is, so*

*to say, a divinity for him on the earth;* he honours it by his probity, by an exact attention to his duties, and by a sincere desire not to be a useless or an embarrassing member of it. The sage has the leaven of order and rule; he is full of the ideas connected with the good of civil society. What experience shows us every day is that the more reason and light people have, the better fitted they are and the more to be relied on for the common intercourse of life.'[1]

The transition is startling from this conception of Philosopher as a very high kind of man of the world to the definition of Philosophy as 'the science of possibles quâ possibles.' Diderot's own reflection comes back to us, *Combien cette maudite métaphysique fait des fous!*[2] We are abruptly plunged from a Baconian into a Leibnitzian atmosphere. We should naturally have expected some such account of Philosophy as that it begins with a limitation of the questions to which men can hope for an answer, and ends in an ordered arrangement of the principles of knowledge, with ultimate reference to the conditions of morals and the structure of civil societies. We should naturally have expected to find, what indeed we do find, that the characteristic of the philosopher is to 'admit nothing without proof, never to acquiesce in illusory notions; to draw rigorously the dividing lines of the certain, the probable, the doubtful; above all things never to pay himself with mere words.' But

[1] See also article *Independance*.
[2] iv. 93.

then these wholesome prescriptions come in an article whose definitions and distribution of philosophy are simply a reproduction from Christian Wolff, and the methods and dialect of Wolff are as essentially alien from the positive spirit of the Encyclopædia as they were from the mystic spirit of Jacobi.

Wolff's place in the philosophical succession of German speculation (1679—1754) is between Leibnitz and Kant, and until Kant came his system was dominant in the country of metaphysics.[1] It is from Wolff that Diderot borrows and throws unassimilated into the pages of the Encyclopædia propositions so fundamentally incongruous as this, that 'among all possibles there must of necessity be a Being subsisting by himself; otherwise there would be possible things, of the possibility of which no account could be given, an assertion that could never be made.' It is a curious thing, and it illustrates again the strangely miscellaneous quality of Diderot's compilation, that the very article which begins by this incorporation of the author of a philosophical system expounded in a score of quartos, ends by a vigorous denunciation of the introduction of the systematic spirit into philosophy.

I shall venture to quote a hardy passage from another article (*Pyrrhonienne*) which some will think a measure of Diderot's philosophical incompetency, and others will think a measure of his good sense. 'We

[1] The reader will find abundant information and criticism upon the Wolffian Philosophy in Professor Edward Caird's *Critical Account of the Philosophy of Kant*, recently published at Glasgow.

will conclude,' he says, 'for our part that as all in nature is bound together, there is nothing, properly speaking, of which man has perfect, absolute, and complete knowledge, because for that he would need knowledge of all. Now as all is bound together, it inevitably happens that, from discussion to discussion, he must come to something unknown: then in starting again from this unknown point, we shall be justified in pleading against him the ignorance or the obscurity or the uncertainty of the point preceding, and of that preceding this, and so forth, up to the most evident principle. So we must admit a sort of sobriety in the use of reason. When step by step I have brought a man to some evident proposition, I shall cease to dispute. I will listen no longer to anybody who goes on to deny the existence of bodies, the rules of logic, the testimony of the senses, the difference between good and evil, true and false, etc., etc. I will turn my back on everybody who tries to lead me away from a simple question, to embark me in discussion as to the nature of matter, of the understanding, of thought, and other subjects shoreless and bottomless.'[1] Whatever else may be said of this, we have to recognise that it is exactly characteristic of the author. But then why have written on metaphysics at all?

We have mentioned the article on Spinosa. It is characteristic both of the good and the bad sides of Diderot's work. Half of it is merely a reproduction of Bayle's criticisms on Spinosa and his system. The

[1] xvi. 491—2.

other half consists of original objections propounded by Diderot with marked vigour of thrust against Spinosa, but there is no evidence that he had gone deeper into Spinosa than the first book of the Ethics. There is no certain sign that he had read anything else, or that he had more of that before him than the extracts that were furnished by Bayle. Such treatment of a serious subject hardly conforms to the modern requirements of the literary conscience, for in truth the literary conscience has now turned specialist and shrinks from the encyclopædic. Diderot's objections are, as we have said, pushed with marked energy of speech. 'However short a way,' he says, 'you penetrate into the thick darkness in which Spinosa has wrapped himself up, you discover a succession of abysses into which this audacious reasoner has precipitated himself, of propositions either evidently false or evidently doubtful, of arbitrary principles substituted for natural principles and sensible truths; an abuse of terms taken for the most part in a wrong sense, a mass of deceptive equivocations, a cloud of palpable contradictions.' The system is monstrous, it is absurd, and ridiculous. It is Spinosa's plausible method that has deceived people; they supposed that one who employed geometry, and proceeded by way of axioms and definitions, must be on the track of truth. They did not see that these axioms were nothing better than very vague and very uncertain propositions; that the definitions were inexact, defective, and bizarre.

We have no space to follow the reasoning by which

Diderot supports this scornful estimate of the famous thinker, of whom it can never be settled whether he be pantheist, atheist, akosmist, or God-intoxicated man. He returns to the charge again and again, as if he felt a certain secret uneasiness lest for scorn so loudly expressed he had not brought forward adequate justification. And the reader feels that Diderot has scarcely hit the true line of cleavage that would have enabled him—from his own point of view—to shatter the Spinosist system. He tries various bouts of logic with Spinosa in connection with detached propositions. Thus he deals with Spinosa's third proposition, that, *in the case of things that have nothing in common with one another, one cannot be the cause of the other.* This proposition, Diderot contends, is false in all moral and occasional causes. The sound of the name of God has nothing in common with the idea of the Creator which that name produces in my mind. A misfortune that overtakes my friend has nothing in common with the grief that I feel in consequence. When I move my arm by an act of will, the movement has nothing in common in its nature with the act of my will; they are very different. I am not a triangle, yet I form the idea of one and I examine its properties. So with the fifth proposition, that *there cannot be in the universe two or more substances of the same nature or the same attributes.* If Spinosa is only talking of the essence of things or of their definition, what he says is naught; for it can only mean that there cannot be in the universe two different essences having the same essence.

Who doubts it? But if Spinosa means that there cannot be an essence which is found in various single objects, in the same way as the essence of triangle is found in the triangle A and the triangle B, then he says what is manifestly untrue. It is not, however, until the last two or three pages that Diderot sets forth his dissent in its widest form. 'To refute Spinosa,' he says at last, 'all that is necessary is to stop him at the first step, without taking the trouble to follow him into a mass of consequences; all that we need do is to substitute for the obscure principle which he makes the base of his system, the following: namely, that *there are several substances*—a principle that in its own way is clear to the last degree. And, in fact, what proposition can be clearer, more striking, more close to the understanding and consciousness of man? I here seek no other judge than the most just impression of the common sense that is spread among the human race. . . . . Now, since common sense revolts against each of Spinosa's propositions, no less than against the first, of which they are the pretended proofs, instead of stopping to reason on each of these proofs where common sense is lost, we should be right to say to him:—Your principle is contrary to common sense; from a principle in which common sense is lost, nothing can issue in which common sense is to be found again.'

The passage sounds unpleasantly like an appeal to the crowd in a matter of science, which is as the sin against the Holy Ghost in these high concerns. What

Diderot meant, probably, was to charge Spinosa with inventing a conception of substance which has no relation to objective experience; and further with giving fantastic answers to questions that were in themselves never worth asking, because the answers must always involve a violent wrench of the terms of experience into the sphere transcending experience, and because, moreover, they can never be verified. Whether he meant this or something else, and whether he would have been right or wrong in such an intention, we may admit that it would have been more satisfactory if in dealing with such a master-type of the metaphysical method as Spinosa, so acute a positive critic as Diderot had taken more pains to give to his objections the utmost breadth of which they were capable.[1]

The article on Leibnitz has less original matter in it than that on Spinosa. The various speculations of that great and energetic intellect in metaphysic, logic, natural theology, natural law, are merely drawn out in a long table of succinct propositions, while the account of the life and character of Leibnitz is simply taken from the excellent éloge which had been published upon him by Fontenelle in 1716. Fontenelle's narrative is reproduced in a generous spirit of admiration and respect for a genius that was like Diderot's own in encyclopædic variety of interest, while it was so far superior to Diderot's in concentration, in subtlety, in precision, in power of construction. If there

[1] There are casual criticisms on Spinosa in the articles on *Identity* and *Liberty*.

could exist over our heads, says Diderot, a species of beings who could observe our works as we watch those of creatures at our feet, with what surprise would such beings have seen those four marvellous insects, Bayle, Descartes, Leibnitz, and Newton. And he then draws up a little calendar of the famous men, out of whom we must choose the name to be placed at the very head of the human race. The list contains, besides Julian the Apostate—who was inserted, we may presume, merely by way of playful insult to the ecclesiastical enemy—Socrates, Marcus Aurelius, Trajan, Bacon, and the four great names that have just been cited. Germany derives as much honour from Leibnitz alone, he concludes with unconsidered enthusiasm, as Greece from Plato, Aristotle, and Archimedes, all put together. As we have said, however, there is no criticism, nor any other sign that Diderot had done more than survey the façade of the great Leibnitzian structure admiringly from without.

The article on Liberty would be extremely remarkable, appearing where it does, and coming from a thinker of Diderot's general capacity, if only we could be sure that Diderot was sincere. As it happens, there is good reason to suppose that he was wholly insincere. It is quite as shallow, from the point of view of philosophy, as his article on the Jews or on the Bible is from the point of view of erudition. One reason for this might not be far to seek. We have repeatedly observed how paramount the social aim and the social test are in Diderot's mind over all other

considerations. But this reference of all subjects of discussion to the good of society, and this measurement of conclusions by their presumed effect on society, is a method that has its own dangers. The aversion of ecclesiastics to unfettered discussion, lest it should damage institutions and beliefs deemed useful to mankind, is the great leading example of this peril. Diderot, it might be said by those who should contend that he wrote what he thought, did not escape exactly the same predicament, as soon as ever he forgot that of all the things that are good for society, Truth is the best. Now, who will believe that it is Diderot, the persecuted editor of the Encyclopædia, and the author of the manly article on Intolerance, who introduces such a passage as the following into the discussion of the everlasting controversy of Free Will and Necessity:—'Take away Liberty, and you leave no more vice nor virtue nor merit in the world; rewards are ridiculous, and punishments unjust. The ruin of Liberty overthrows all order and all police, confounds vice and virtue, authorises every monstrous infamy, extinguishes the last spark of shame and remorse, degrades and disfigures beyond recovery the whole human race. *A doctrine of such enormity as this ought not to be examined in the schools; it ought to be punished by the magistrates.*'[1] Of course, this was exactly what the Jesuits said about a belief in God, about revelation, and about the institutions of the church. To take away these, they said, is to throw

[1] xv. 501.

down the bulwarks of order, and an attempt to take them away, as by encyclopædists or others, ought to be punished by the magistrates. Diderot had for the moment clearly lost himself.

We need hardly be surprised if an article conceived in this spirit contains no serious contribution to the difficult question with which it deals. Diderot had persuaded himself that, without Free Will, all those emotional moralities in the way of sympathy and benevolence and justice which he adored, would be lowered to the level of mere mechanism. 'If men are not free in what they do of good and evil, then,' he cries, in what is surely a paroxysm of unreason, 'good is no longer good, and evil no longer evil.' As if the outward quality and effects of good and evil were not independent of the mental operations which precede human action. Murder would not cease to be an evil, simply because it had been proved that the murderer's will to do a bad deed was the result of antecedents. Acts have marks and consequences of their own, good or bad, whatever may be the state of mind of those who do them. But Diderot does not seem to divine the true issue; he writes as if Necessarians or Determinists denied the existence of volitions, and as if the question were whether volitions do exist. Nobody denies that they exist; the real question is of the conditions under which they exist. Are they determined by antecedents, or are they self-determined, spontaneous, and unconnected? Is Will independent of cause?

Diderot's argumentation is, in fact, merely a protest that man is conscious of a Will. And just as in other parts of his article Diderot by Liberty means only the existence of Will, so by Liberty he means only the healthy condition of the soul, and not its independence of causation. We need not waste words on so dire a confusion, nor on the theory that Will is sometimes dependent on cerebral antecedents and sometimes not. The curious thing is that the writer should not have perceived that he was himself in this preposterous theory propounding the very principle which he denounced as destructive to virtue, ruinous to society, and worthy of punishment by the government. For it seems that, after all, the Will of those whose 'dispositions are not moderate' is not free; and we may surely say that those whose dispositions are least moderate, are exactly the most violent malefactors against the common weal. One more passage is worth quoting to show how little the writer had seized the true meaning of the debate. 'According to you,' he says to Bayle, 'it is not clear that it is at the pure choice of my will to move my arm or not to move it: if that be so, it is then necessarily determined that within a quarter of an hour from now I shall lift my hand three times together, or that I shall not. Now, if you seriously pretend that I am not free, you cannot refuse an offer that I make you; I will wager a thousand pistoles to one that I will do, in the matter of moving my hand, exactly the opposite to what you back; and you may take your choice. If

you do not think the wager fair, it can only be because of your necessary and invincible judgment that I am free.' As if the will to move or not to move the arm would be uncaused and unaffected by antecedents, when you have just provided so strong an antecedent as the desire to save a thousand pistoles. It was, perhaps, well enough for Voltaire to content himself with vague poetical material for his poetical discourse on Liberty, but from Diderot, whether as editor or as writer, something better might have been expected than a clumsy reproduction of the reasoning by which men like Turretini had turned philosophy into the corrupted handmaid of theology.

The most extraordinary thing about this extraordinary article still remains to be told. It was written, we may suppose, between 1757 and 1762, or about that time. In June, 1756, Diderot wrote to a certain Landois, a fellow-worker on the Encyclopædia, a letter containing the most emphatic possible repudiation of the whole doctrine of Liberty. 'Liberty is a word void of sense; there are not and there never can have been free beings; we are only what fits in with the general order, with organization, with education, and with the chain of events. We can no more conceive a being acting without a motive, than we can conceive one of the arms of a balance acting without a weight; and the motive is always exterior and foreign to us, attached either by nature or by some cause or other that is not ourselves. *There is only one sort of causes, properly speaking, and those are*

*physical causes.*'[1] And so forth in the vein of hard and remorseless necessarianism, which we shall find presently in the pages of the System of Nature.[2]

There is only one explanation of this flagrant contradiction. Diderot must have written on Liberty just as he wrote on Jesus Christ or the Bible. He cannot have said what he thought, but only what the persons in authority required him to pretend to think. We may be sure that a letter to an intimate would be more likely to contain his real opinion than an article published in the Encyclopædia. That such mystifications are odious, are shameful, are almost too degrading a price to pay for the gains of such a work, we may all readily enough admit. All that we can do is to note so flagrant a case, as a striking example of the common artifices of the time. One other point we may note. The fervour and dexterity with which Diderot made what he knew to be the worse appear the better cause, make a still more striking example of his astonishing dramatic power of throwing himself, as dialectician, casuist, sophist, into a false and illusive part.

Turning from the philosophical to the political or social group of articles, we find little to add to what has been said in the previous section. One of the most excellent essays in this group is that on Luxury. Diderot opens ingeniously with a list of the propositions that state the supposed evils of luxury, and under each proposition he places the most striking case that he can find in history of its falseness. He goes through

[1] xix. 435-36. [2] See below, vol. ii.

the same process with the propositions asserting the gains of luxury to a society. Having thus effectually disposed of any wholesale way of dealing with the subject, he proceeds to make a number of observations on the gains and drawbacks of luxury; these are full of sense and freedom from commonplace. Such articles as *Pouvoir*, *Souverain*, *Autorité*, do little more than tell over again the old unhistoric story about a society surrendering a portion of its sovereign power to some individual or dynasty to hold in trust. It is worth remarking how little democratic were Diderot and his school in any Jacobinical, or anarchic, or even more respectable modern sense. There is in Diderot's contributions many a firm and manly plea for the self-respect of the common people, but not more than once or twice is there a syllable of the disorder which smoulders under the pages of Rousseau. Thus:—

'When the dwellers among the fields are well treated, the number of proprietors insensibly grows greater, the extreme distance and the vile dependence of poor on rich grow less; hence the people have courage, force of soul, and strength of body; they love their country, they respect the magistrates, they are attached to a prince, to an order, and to laws to which they owe their peace and wellbeing. And you will no longer see the son of the honourable tiller of the soil so ready to quit the noble calling of his forefathers, nor so ready to go and sully himself with the liveries and with the contempt of the man of wealth.'[1]

[1] S. v. *Luxe*. xvi. 23,

No one can find fault with democratic sentiment of this kind, nor with the generous commonplaces of the moralist, about virtue being the only claim to honour, and vice the only true source of shame and inferiority. But neither Diderot nor Voltaire ever allowed himself to flatter the crowd for qualities which the crowd can scarcely possess. The little article on Multitude seems merely inserted for the sake of buffeting unwarranted pretensions. 'Distrust the judgment of the multitude in all matters of reasoning and philosophy; there its voice is the voice of malice, folly, inhumanity, irrationality, and prejudice. Distrust it again in things that suppose much knowledge or a fine taste. The multitude is ignorant and dulled. Distrust it in morality; it is not capable of strong and generous actions; it rather wonders at such actions than approves them; heroism is almost madness in its eyes. Distrust it in the things of sentiment; is delicacy of sentiment so common a thing that you can accord it to the multitude? In what then is the multitude right? In everything, but only at the end of a very long time, because then it has become an echo, repeating the judgment of a small number of sensible men who shape the judgment of posterity for it beforehand. If you have on your side the testimony of your conscience, and against you that of the multitude, take comfort and be assured that time does justice.' It is far from being a universal gift among men of letters and others to unite this fastidious estimation of the incapacity of the crowd in the higher

provinces of the intellectual judgment, with a fervid desire that the life of the crowd should be made worthy of self-respecting men.

The same hand that wrote the defiance of the populace that has just been quoted, wrote also this short article on Misery:—'There are few souls so firm that misery does not in the long run cast them down and degrade them. The poor common people are incredibly stupid. I know not what false dazzling prestige closes their eyes to their present wretchedness, and to the still deeper wretchedness that awaits the years of old age. Misery is the mother of great crimes. It is the sovereigns who make the miserable, and it is they who shall answer in this world and the other for the crimes that misery has committed.'

So far as the mechanism of government is concerned, Diderot writes much as Montesquieu had done. Under the head of *Représentants* he proclaims the advantages, not exactly of government by a representative assembly, but of assisting and advising the royal government by means of such an assembly. There is no thought of universal suffrage. '*It is property that makes the citizen;* every man who has possessions in the state is interested in the state, and whatever be the rank that particular conventions may assign to him, it is always as a proprietor; it is by reason of his possessions that he ought to speak, and that he acquires the right of having himself represented.' Yet this very definite statement does not save him from the standing difficulty of a democratic

philosophy of politics. Nor can it be reconciled in point of logic with other propositions to which Diderot commits himself in the same article. For instance, he says that 'no order of citizens is capable of stipulating for all; if one order had the right, it would very soon come to stipulate only for itself; each class ought to be represented by men who know its condition and its needs; *these needs are only well-known to those who actually feel them.*' But then, in that case, the poorest classes are those who have most need of direct representation; they are the most numerous, their needs are sharpest, they are the classes to which war, consumption of national capital and way of expending national income, equal laws, judicial administration, and the other concerns of a legislative assembly, come most close. The problem is to reconcile the sore interests of the multitude with the ignorance and the temper imputed in Diderot's own description of them.

An interesting study might be made, if the limits of our subject permitted such a digression, on the new political ideas which a century's experience in England, France, Germany, the American Union, has added to the publicist's stock. Diderot's article on the Legislator is a curious mixture of views which political thinkers have left behind, with views which the most enlightened statesmen have taken up. There is much talk after the fashion of Jean Jacques Rousseau about the admirable legislation of Lycurgus at Sparta, the philosophical government of the great empire of

China, and the fine spirit of the institutions of Peru. We perceive that the same influences which made Rousseau's political sentimentalism so popular, also brought even strong heads like Diderot to believe in the unbounded power of a government to mould men at its will, and to impose institutions at discretion. The idea that it is the main function of a government to make its people virtuous, is generally as strong in Diderot as it was in Rousseau, and as it became in Robespierre. He admires the emperors of China, because their edicts are as the exhortation of a father to his children. All edicts, he says, ought to instruct and to exhort as much as they command. Yet two years after the Encyclopædia was finished (1774), when Turgot prefaced his reforming edicts by elaborate and reasoned statements of the grounds for them, it was found that his prefaces caused greater provocation than the very laws that they introduced.

Apart from the common form of enthusiasm for the 'sublime legislation' of countries which the writer really knew nothing about, the article on the Legislator has some points worth noticing. We have seen how Diderot made the possession of property the true note of citizenship, and of a claim to share in the government. But he did not pay property this compliment for nothing. It is, he says, the business of the legislator to do his best to make up to mankind for the loss of that equality, which was one of the comforts that men surrendered when they gave up the state of nature. Hence the legislator ought to take

care that no one shall reach a position of extreme opulence otherwise than by an industry that enriches the state. 'He must take care that the charges of society shall fall upon the rich, who enjoy the advantages of society.' Even those who agree with Diderot, and are ready to vote for a graduated income-tax, will admit that he comes to his conclusion without knowing or reflecting about either the serious arguments for it, or the serious objections against it.

What is really interesting in this long article is its anticipation of those ideas which in England we associate with the name of Cobden. 'All the men of all lands have become necessary to one another for the exchange of the fruits of industry and the products of the soil. Commerce is a new bond among men. Every nation has an interest in these days in the preservation by every other nation of its wealth, its industry, its banks, its luxury, its agriculture. The ruin of Leipzig, of Lisbon, and of Lima has led to bankruptcies on all the exchanges of Europe, and has affected the fortunes of many millions of persons.'[1] In the same spirit he foresees the decline of patriotism in its older and narrower sense, and the predominance of

[1] As an illustration how much these ideas were in the air, the reader may refer to a passage in Sédaine's popular comedy, *The Philosopher without knowing it* (1765), Act II. Sc. iv. Vanderk, among other things, says of the merchant:—'Ce n'est pas un temple, ce n'est pas une seule nation qu'il sert; il les sert toutes, et en est servi: c'est l'homme de l'univers. Quelques particuliers audacieux font armer les rois, la guerre s'allume, tout s'embrase l'Europe est divisée; mais ce négociant anglais, hollandais, russe ou chinois, n'en est pas moins l'ami de mon cœur: nous sommes sur la superficie de la terre autant de fils de soie qui lient ensemble les nations, et les ramènent à la paix par la nécessité du commerce; voilà, mon fils, ce que c'est qu'un honnête négociant.'

the international over the national sentiment. 'All nations now have sufficiently just ideas of their neighbours, and consequently, they have less enthusiasm for their country than in the old days of ignorance. There is little enthusiasm where there is much light; enthusiasm is nearly always the emotion of a soul that is more passionate than it is instructed. By comparing among all nations laws with laws, talents with talents, and manners with manners, nations will find so little reason to prefer themselves to others, that if they preserve for their own country that love which is the fruit of personal interest, at least they will lose that enthusiasm which is the fruit of an exclusive self-esteem.'

Yet Diderot had the perspicacity to discern the drawbacks to such a revolution in the conditions of social climate. 'Commerce, like enlightenment, lessens ferocity but also, just as enlightenment takes away the enthusiasm of self-esteem, so perhaps commerce takes away the enthusiasm of virtue. It gradually extinguishes the spirit of magnanimous disinterestedness, and replaces it by that of hard justice. By turning men's minds rather to use than beauty, to prudence rather than to greatness, it may be that it injures the strength, the generosity, the nobleness of manners.'

All this, whether it come to much or little, is at least more true than Diderot's assurance that henceforth for any nation in Europe to make conquests must be a moral impossibility. Napoleon Bonaparte was then a child in arms. Whether his career was on the

whole a fulfilment or a contradiction of Diderot's proposition, may be disputed.

And so our sketch of the great book must at length end. Let us make one concluding remark. Is it not surprising that a man of Diderot's speculative boldness and power should have failed to rise from the mechanical arrangement of thought and knowledge, up to some higher and more commanding conception of the relation between himself in the eighteenth century, or ourselves in the nineteenth, and all those great systems of thought, method, and belief, which in various epochs and over different spaces of the globe have given men working answers to the questions that their leading spirits were moved to put to themselves and to the iron universe around them? We constantly feel how near Diderot is to the point of view that would have brought light. We feel how very nearly ready he was to see the mental experiences of the race in east and west, not as superstition, degradation, grovelling error, but as aspects of intellectual effort and aspiration richly worthy of human interest and scientific consideration, and in their aim as well as in their substance all of one piece with the newest science and the last voices of religious or anti-religious development. Diderot was the one member of the party of Philosophers who was capable of grasping such a thought. If this guiding idea of the unity of the intellectual history of man, and the organic integrity of thought, had happily come into Diderot's mind, we should have had

an Encyclopædia indeed; a survey and representation of all the questions and answers of the world, such as would in itself have suggested what questions are best worth putting, and at the same time have furnished its own answers.

For this the moment was not yet. An urgent social task lay before France and before Europe; it could not be postponed until the thinkers had worked out a scheme of philosophic completeness. The thinkers did not seriously make any effort after this completeness. The Encyclopædia was the most serious attempt, and it did not wholly fail. As I replace in my shelves this mountain of volumes, 'dusky and huge, enlarging on the sight,' I have a presentiment that their pages will seldom again be disturbed by me or by others. They served a great purpose a hundred years ago. They are now a monumental ruin, clothed with all the profuse associations of history. It is no Ozymandias of Egypt, king of kings, whose wrecked shape of stone and sterile memories we contemplate. We think rather of the grey and crumbling walls of an ancient stronghold, reared by the endeavour of stout hands and faithful, whence in its own day and generation a band once went forth against barbarous hordes to strike a blow for humanity and truth.

## *CHAPTER VI.*

### *SOCIAL LIFE.*

### *(1759—1770.)*

ANYONE must be ignorant of the facts, who supposes that the men of the eighteenth century who did not believe in God and were as little continent as King David, were therefore no better than the reckless vagabonds of Grub Street. Diderot, after he had once settled down to his huge task, became a very orderly person. It is true that he had an attachment to a lady who was not his wife. Marriage was in those days among the courtiers and the encyclopædic circle too habitually regarded as merely an official relation. Provided that there was no official desertion, and no scandal, the world had nothing to say. Diderot was no worse than his neighbours, though we may well be sorry that a man of his generous sympathies and fine impulse was no better than his neighbours. Mademoiselle Voland, after proper deduction made for the manners of the time, was of a respectable and sentimental type. Her family were of good position; she lived with her mother and sisters, and Diderot was on good terms with them all. We have a glimpse of the characteristics of the three ladies in a little dialogue between

Diderot and some one whom he met, and who happened to have made their acquaintance. 'He informed me that he had passed three months in the country where you are.—*Three months*, said he, *is more than one needs to go mad about Madame Le Gendre.*[1]—True, but then she is so reserved.—*I scarcely know any woman with such an amount of self-respect.*—She is quite right.—*Madame Voland is a woman of rare merit.*—Yes, and her eldest daughter?—*She has the cleverness of a very devil.*—She is very clever, no doubt; but what I especially like is her frankness. I would lay a wager that she has never told a voluntary lie since she came to years of discretion.'[2] The relations between Diderot and Sophie Voland were therefore not at all on the common footing of a low amour with a coarse or frivolous woman of the world. All the proprieties of appearance were scrupulously observed. Their mutual passion, though once not wholly without its gallantries, soon took on that worthy and decorous quality into which the ardour of valiant youth is reluctantly softened by middle age, when we gravely comfort it with names of philosophic compliment.

One of the most interesting of all the documentary memorials of the century is to be found in the letters which Diderot wrote to Mademoiselle Voland. No doubt has ever been thrown on the authenticity of these letters, and they bear ample evidence of genuineness, so far as the substance of them is concerned, in

[1] The younger sister of Diderot's Sophie.
[2] xviii. 454.

their characteristic style. They were first published in 1830, from manuscripts sold to the bookseller the year before by a certain French man of letters, Jeudy-Dugour by name. He became a naturalised Russian, changed his name to Gouroff, and died in the position of councillor of state and director of the university of St. Petersburg. How he came by any papers of Diderot it is impossible to guess. It is assumed that when Mademoiselle Voland died, her family gave his letters and other papers back to Diderot. These, along with other documents, are supposed to have been given by Diderot to Grimm. Thence they went to the Library of the Hermitage at Saint Petersburg. Whether Jeudy-Dugour sold copies or originals, and whether he made the copies, if copies they were, from the Library, which was, however, rigorously closed during the reign of Nicholas I., are literary secrets which it is impossible to fathom. So far as Diderot is concerned, some of the spirit of mystification that haunted literature in the eighteenth century, still hovers about it in the nineteenth. This we shall presently find in a still more interesting monument of Diderot than even his letters to Mademoiselle Voland.[1]

They are not a continuous series. It was only when either Diderot was absent from Paris, or his correspondent was away at her mother's house in the country, that letter-writing was necessary. Diderot appears to have written to her openly and without disguise. The letters of Mademoiselle Voland in reply were

[1] See vol. ii., the chapter on *Rameau's Neph*ew.

for obvious reasons not sent to Diderot's house, but under cover to the office of Damilaville, so well known to the reader of Voltaire's correspondence. Damilaville was a commissioner in one of the revenue departments, and it is one among many instances of the connivance between authority and its foes, that most of the letters and packets of Voltaire, Diderot, and the rest of the group, should have been taken in, sent out, guarded, and franked by the head of a government office. The trouble that Damilaville willingly took in order to serve his friends is another example of what we have already remarked as the singular amiability and affectionate solicitude of these times. 'Think of Damilaville's attention,' says Diderot on one occasion: 'to-day is Sunday, and he was obliged to leave his office. He was sure that I should come this evening, for I never fail when I hope for a letter from you. He left the key with two candles on a table, and between the two candles your little letter, and a pleasant note of his own.' And by the light of the candles Diderot at once wrote a long answer.[1]

We need not wonder if much is said in these letters of tardy couriers, missing answers, intolerable absences, dreary partings, delicious anticipations. All these are the old eternal talk of men and women, ever since the world began; without them we should hardly know that we are reading the words of man to woman. They are in our present case only the setting of a singularly frank and open picture of a man's life.

[1] Nov. 10, 1760; xix. 22.

It is held by some that one of the best means of giving the sense of a little fixity to lives that are but as the evanescent fabric of a dream and the shadow of smoke, is to secure stability of topographical centre by abiding in the same house. Diderot is one of the few who complied with this condition. For thirty years he occupied the fourth and fifth floors of a house which was still standing not long ago at the corner of the rue Saint Benoît by the rue Taranne, in that Paris which our tourists leave unexplored, but which is nevertheless the true Paris of the eighteenth century. Of the equipment of his room we have a charming picture by the hand of its occupant. It occurs in his playful Regrets on My Old Dressing-gown, so rich in happy and delightful touches.

'What induced me to part with it? It was made for me; I was made for it. It moulded itself to all the turns and outlines of my body without fretting me. I was picturesque and beautiful; its successor, so stiff, so heavy, makes a mere mannikin of me. There was no want to which its complaisance did not lend itself, for indigence is ever obsequious. Was a book covered with dust, one of the lappets lent itself to wipe the dust away. Did the thick ink refuse to flow from the pen, it proffered a fold. You saw traced in the long black lines upon it, how many a service it had rendered me. Those long lines announced the man of letters, the writer, the workman. And now I have all the mien of a rich idler; you know not who I may be. I was the absolute master of my old robe; I am the slave of my new one. The dragon that guarded the golden fleece was not more restless than I. Care wraps me about.

'The old man who has delivered himself up bound hand and foot to the caprices of a young giddypate, says from morning to night: Ah, where is my old, my kind housekeeper? What demon

possessed me the day that I dismissed her for this creature? Then he sighs, he weeps. I do not weep nor sigh; but at every moment I say: Cursed be the man who invented the art of making common stuff precious by dyeing it scarlet! Cursed be the costly robe that I stand in awe of! Where is my old, my humble, my obliging piece of homespun?

'That is not all, my friend. Hearken to the ravages of luxury —of a luxury that must needs be consistent with itself. My old gown was at one with the things about me. A straw-bottomed chair, a wooden table, a deal shelf that held a few books, and three or four engravings, dimmed by smoke, without a frame, nailed at the four corners to the wall. Among the engravings three or four casts in plaster were hung up; they formed, with my old dressing-gown, the most harmonious indigence. All has become discord. No more ensemble, no more unity, no more beauty.

'The woman who comes into the house of a widower, the minister who steps into the place of a statesman in disgrace, the molinist bishop who gets hold of a jansenist diocese,—none of all these people cause more trouble than the intruding scarlet has caused to me.

'I can bear without disgust the sight of a peasant-woman. The bit of coarse canvas that covers her head, the hair falling about her cheeks, the rags that only half cover her, the poor short skirt that goes no more than half-way down her legs, the naked feet covered with mud—all these things do not wound me; 'tis the image of a condition that I respect, 'tis the sign and summary of a state that is inevitable, that is woful, and that I pity with all my heart. But my gorge rises, and in spite of the scented air that follows her, I turn my eyes from the courtesan, whose fine lace head-gear and torn cuffs, white stockings and worn-out shoes, show me the misery of the day in company with the opulence of last night. Such would my house have been, if the imperious scarlet had not forced all into harmony with itself. I had two engravings that were not without merit, Poussin's Manna in the Wilderness and the same painter's Esther before Ahasuerus; the one is driven out in shame by some old man of Rubens's: the Fall

of the Manna is scattered to the winds by a Storm of Vernet's. The old straw chair is banished to the ante-room by a luxurious thing of morocco. Homer, Virgil, Horace, Cicero, have been taken from their shelf and shut up in a case of grand marqueterie work, an asylum worthier of them than of me. The wooden table still held its ground, protected by a vast pile of pamphlets and papers heaped pell-mell upon it; they seemed as if they would long protect it from its doom. Yet one day that too was mastered by fate, and in spite of my idleness pamphlets and papers went to arrange themselves in the shelves of a costly bureau. . . . It was thus that the edifying retreat of the philosopher became transformed into the scandalous cabinet of the farmer-general. Thus I too am insulting the national misery.

'Of my early mediocrity there remained only a list carpet. The shabby carpet hardly matches with my splendour. I feel it. But I have sworn and I swear that I will keep this carpet, as the peasant who was raised from a hut to the palace of his sovereign still kept his wooden shoes. When in a morning, clad in the sumptuous scarlet, I enter my room, if I lower my eyes I perceive my old list carpet; it recalls to me my early state, and rising pride stands checked. No, my friend, I am not corrupted. My door is open as ever to want; it finds me affable as ever; I listen to its tale, I counsel, I pity, I succour it.' . . . .

Yet the interior of Socrates-Diderot was as little blessed by domestic sympathy as the interior of the older and greater Socrates. Of course Diderot was far enough from being faultless. His wife is described by Rousseau as a shrew and a scold. It is too plain that she was so; sullen to her husband, impatient with her children, and exacting and unreasonable with her servants.[1] We cannot pretend accurately to

[1] See, for instance, xix. 81, 91, 129, 133, 145, &c., passages which Mr. Carlyle and Rosenkranz have either overlooked, or else, without any good reason, disbelieved.

divide the blame. The companionship was very dreary, and the picture grievous and most afflicting to our thoughts. Diderot returns in the evening from D'Holbach's, throws his carpet-bag in at the door, flies off to seek a letter from Mademoiselle Voland, writes one to her, gets back to his house at midnight, finds his daughter ill, puts cheerful and cordial questions to his wife, she replies with a tartness that drives him back into silence.[1] Another time the scene is violent. A torrent of injustice and unreasonableness flows over him for two long hours, and he wonders what the woman will profit, after she has made him burst a blood-vessel; he groans in anguish,—'Ah, how hard life seems to me to bear! how many a time would I accept the end of it with joy!'[2] So sharp are the goads in a divided house; so sorely with ache and smart and deep-welling tears do men and women rend into shreds the fine web of one another's lives. But the pity of it, O the pity of it!

There are many brighter intervals which make one willing to suppose that if the wife had been a little more patient, more tolerant, more cheerful, less severely addicted to her sterile superstition, there might have been somewhat more happiness in the house. One misery of the present social ideal of women is that, while it keeps them so systematically ignorant, superstitious, and narrow, it leaves them without humility. 'Be content,' said the great John Wesley to his froward wife, 'be content to be a private insignificant

[1] xviii. 293. [2] xix. 46.

person, known and loved by God and me. Of what importance is your character to mankind? If you was buried just now, or if you had never lived, what loss would it be to the cause of God?' This energetic remonstrance can hardly be said to exhaust the matter. Still it puts a wholesome side of the case which Madame Diderot missed, and which better persons are likely to miss, so long as the exclusion of women, by common opinion or by law, from an active participation in the settlement of great issues makes them indifferent to all interests outside domestic egoism and egoistic and personal religion. Brighter intervals shone in the household. 'I announced my departure,' writes Diderot, 'for next Tuesday. At the first word I saw the faces both of mother and daughter fall. The child had a compliment for my fête-day all ready, and it would not do to let her waste the trouble of having learnt it. The mother had projected a grand dinner for Sunday. Well, we arranged everything perfectly. I made my journey, and came back to be harangued and feasted. The poor child made her little speech in the most bewitching way. In the middle there came some hard words, so she stopped and said to me, "My papa, 'tis because my two front teeth have come out"—as was true. Then she went on. At the end, as she had a posy to give me, and it could not be found, she stopped a second time to say to me—"Here's the worst of the tale; my pinks have got lost." Then she started off in search of her flowers. We dined in

great style. My wife had got all her friends together. I was very gay, eating, drinking, and doing the honours of my table to perfection. On rising from table I stayed among them and played cards instead of going out. I saw them all off between eleven and twelve: I was charming, and if you only knew with whom; what physiognomies, what folk, what talk!'

Another time the child, whispering in his ear, asks why her mother bade her not remind him that the morrow was the mother's fête-day. The presence of the blithe all-hoping young, looking on with innocent unconscious eyes at the veiled tragedy of love turned to bitter discord, gives to such scenes their last touch of piteousness. Diderot, however, observed the day, and presented a bouquet which was neither well nor ill received. At the birthday dinner the master of the house presided. 'If you had been behind the curtains, you would have said to yourself, How can all this gossip and twaddle find a place in the same head with certain ideas! And in truth I was charming, and played the fool to a marvel.'[1]

In the midst of distractions great and small, was an indomitable industry. 'I tell you,' he wrote, 'and I tell all men, when you are ill at ease with yourself, instantly set about some good work. In busying myself to soothe the trouble of another, I forget my own.' He was assiduous in teaching his daughter, though he complained that her mother crushed out in a day what it had taken him a month to implant.

[1] xix. 84. See also 326.

The booksellers found him the most cheerful and strenuous bondsman that ever booksellers had. He would pass a whole month without a day's break, working ten hours every day at the revision of proof-sheets. Sometimes he remains a whole week without leaving his work-room. He wears out his eyes over plates and diagrams, bristling with figures and letters, and with no more refreshing thought in the midst of this sore toil than that insult, persecution, torment, trickery, will be the fruit of it. He not only spent whole days bent over his desk, until he had a feeling as of burning flame within him; he also worked through the hours of the night. On one of these occasions, worn out with fatigue and weariness, he fell asleep with his head on his desk; the light fell down among his papers, and he awoke to find half the books and papers on the desk burnt to ashes. 'I kept my own counsel about it,' he writes, 'because a single hint of such an accident would have robbed my wife of sleep for the rest of her life.'[1]

His favourite form of holiday was a visit to D'Holbach's country house at Grandval. There he spent some six weeks or more nearly every autumn after 1759. The manner of life there was delightful to him. There was perfect freedom, the mistress of the house neither rendering strict duties of ceremony nor exacting them. Diderot used to rise at six or at eight, and remain in his own room until one, reading, writing, meditating. Nobody was more exquisitely

[1] xix. 137, 341, etc.

sensible than Diderot to the charm of loitering over books, 'over those authors,' as he said, 'who ravish us from ourselves, in whose hands nature has placed a fairy wand, with which they no sooner touch us than straightway we forget the evils of life, the darkness lifts from our souls, and we are reconciled to existence.'[1] The musing suggestiveness of reading when we read only for reading's sake, and not for reproduction nor direct use, was as delightful to our laborious drudge as to others, but he could indulge himself with little of this sweet idleness. It was in harder labour that he passed most of his mornings. These hours of work achieved, he dressed and went down among his friends. Then came the mid-day dinner, which was sumptuous; host and guests both ate and drank more than was good for health. After a short siesta, towards four o'clock they took their sticks and went forth to walk, among woods, over ploughed fields, up hills, through quagmires, delighting in nature. As they went, they talked of history, or politics, or chemistry, of literature, or physics, or morality. At sundown they returned, to find lights and cards on the tables, and they made parties of piquet, interrupted by supper. At half-past ten the game ends, they chat until eleven, and in half an hour more they are all fast asleep.[2] Each day was like the next; industry, gaiety, bodily comfort, mental activity, diversifying the hours. Grimm was often there, 'the most French of all the Germans,' and Galiani, the

[1] xviii. 535. [2] xviii. 507, etc.

most nimble-witted of men, inexhaustible in story, inimitable in pantomimic narration, and yet with the keenest intellectual penetration shining through all his Neapolitan prank and buffoonery. D'Holbach cared most for the physical sciences. Marmontel brought a vein of sentimentalism, and Helvétius a vein of cynical formalism. Diderot played Socrates, Panurge, Pantophile; questioning, instructing, combining; pouring out knowledge and suggestion, full of interest in every subject, sympathetic with every vein, relishing alike the newest philosophic hardihood, the last too merry mood of D'Holbach's mother-in-law, the freshest piece of news brought by a traveller. It was not at Grandval that he found life hard to bear, or would have accepted its close with joy. And indeed if one could by miracle be transported back into the sixth decade of that dead century for a single day, perhaps one might choose that such a day should be passed among the energetic and vivid men who walked of an afternoon among the fields and woods of Grandval.

The unblushing grossness of speech which even the ladies of the party permitted themselves, cannot be reproduced in the decorous print of our age. It is nothing less than inconceivable to us how Diderot can have brought himself to write down, in letters addressed to a woman of good education and decent manners, some of the talk that went on at Grandval. The coarsest schoolboy of these days would wince at such shameless freedoms. But it would be wrong to forget the allowance that must be made for differences

in point of fashion. Diderot, for instance, in these very letters is appallingly frank in his exposure of the details of his health. He describes his indigestion, and other more indescribable obstructions to happiness, as freely as Cicero wrote about the dysentery which punished him, when, after he had resisted oysters and lampreys at supper, he yielded to a dish of beet and mallow dressed with pot-herbs *ut nil posset esse suavius.* Whatever men could say to one another or to their surgeons, they saw no harm in saying to women. We have to remember how Sir Walter Scott's great-aunt, about the very time when Diderot was writing to Mademoiselle Voland, had heard Mrs. Aphara Behn's books read aloud for the amusement of large circles, consisting of the first and most creditable society in London. We think of Swift, in an earlier part of the century, enclosing to Stella some recklessly gross verses of his own upon Bolingbroke, and habitually writing to fine ladies in a way that Falstaff might have thought too bad for Doll Tearsheet. In saying that these coarse impurities are only points of manners, we are as far as possible from meaning that they are on that account unimportant. But it is childish to waste our time in censorious judgment on the individual who does no worse than represent a ruling type. We can only note the difference and pass on.

A characteristic trait in this rural life is Diderot's passion for high winds. They gave him a transport, and to hear the storm at night, tossing the trees, drenching the ground with rain, and filling the air

with the bass of its hoarse ground-tones, was one of his keenest delights.[1] Yet Diderot was not of those in whom the feeling for the great effects of nature has something of savagery. He was above all things human, and the human lot was the central source of his innermost meditations. In the midst of gossip is constantly interpolated some passage of fine reflection on life—reflection as sincere, as real, coming as spontaneously from the writer's inmost mood and genuine sentiment, as little tainted either by affectation or by commonness, as ever passed through the mind of a man. Some of these are too characteristic to be omitted, and there is so little of what is exquisite in the flavour of Diderot's style, that he perhaps suffers less from the clumsiness of translation than writers of finer colour or more stirring melody. One of these passages is as follows :—

'The last news from Paris has made the Baron anxious, as he has considerable sums in royal securities. He said to his wife: "Listen, my friend: if this is going on, I put down the carriage, I buy you a good cloak and a good parasol, and for the rest of our days we will bless the minister for ridding us of horses, lackeys, coachmen, ladies'-maids, cooks, great dinner-parties, false friends, tiresome bores, and all the other privileges of opulence." And for my part I began to think, that for a man without wife or child, or any of those connexions that make us long for money, and never leave any superfluity, it would be almost indifferent whether he were poor or rich. This paradox comes of the equality that I discover among various conditions of life, and in the little difference that I allow, in point of happiness, between the master of the house and the hall-porter. If I am sound in mind and body, if I have

[1] xviii. 526, 531.

worth and a pure conscience, if I know the true from the false, if I avoid evil and do good, if I feel the dignity of my being, if nothing lowers me in my own eyes, then people may call me what they will, *My Lord*, or *Sirrah*. To do what is good, to know what is true,—that is what distinguishes one man from another; the rest is nothing. The duration of life is so short, its true needs are so narrow, and when we go away, it all matters so little whether we have been somebody or nobody. When the end comes, all that you want is a sorry piece of canvas and four deal boards. In the morning I hear the labourers under my window. Scarce has the day dawned before they are at work with spade and barrow, delving and wheeling. They munch a crust of black bread; they quench their thirst at the flowing stream; at noon they snatch an hour of sleep on the hard ground. They are cheerful; they sing as they work; they exchange their good broad pleasantries with one another; they shout with laughter. At sundown they go home to find their children naked round a smoke-blackened hearth, a woman hideous and dirty, and their lot is neither worse nor better than mine. I came down from my room in bad spirits; I heard talk about the public misery; I sat down to table full of good cheer without an appetite; I had a stomach overloaded with the dainties of the day before; I grasped a stick and set out for a walk to find relief; I returned to play cards, and cheat the heavy-weighing hours. I had a friend of whom I could not hear; I was far from a woman whom I sighed for. Troubles in the country, troubles in the town, troubles everywhere. He who knows not trouble is not to be counted among the children of men. All gets paid off in time; the good by the evil, evil by good, and life is naught. Perhaps to-morrow night or Monday morning we may go to pass a day in town; so I shall see the woman for whom I sighed, and recover the man of whom I could not hear. But I shall lose them the next day; and the more I feel the happiness of being with them, the worse I shall suffer at parting. That is the way that all things go. Turn and turn and turn again; there is ever a crumpled rose-leaf to vex you.'[1]

[1] Nov. 2, 1759; xviii. 431.

It is not often that we find such active benevolence as Diderot's in conjunction with such a vein of philosophy as follows :—

'Ah, what a fine comedy this world would be, if only one had not to play a part in it ; if one existed, for instance, in some point of space, in that interval of the celestial orbs where the gods of Epicurus slumber, far, far away, whence one could see this globe, on which we strut so big, about the size of a pumpkin, and whence one could watch all the airs and tricks of that two-footed mite who calls itself man. I would fain only look at the scenes of life in reduced size, so that those which are stamped with atrocity may be brought down to an inch in space, and to actors half a line high. But how bizarre that our sense of revolt against injustice is in the ratio of the space and the mass. I am furious if a large animal unjustly attacks another. I feel nothing at all if it is two atoms that tear and rend. How our senses affect our morality. There is a fine text for philosophizing !'[1]

'What I see every day of physic and physicians does not much heighten my opinion of them. To come into the world in imbecility, in the midst of anguish and cries ; to be the toy of ignorance, of error, of necessity, of sickness, of malice, of all passions; to return step by step to that imbecility whence one sprang ; from the moment when we lisp our first words down to the moment when we mumble the words of our dotage, to live among rascals and charlatans of every kind; to lie expiring between a man who feels your pulse and another man who frets and wearies your head; not to know whence one comes, nor why one has come, nor whither one is going—that is what we call the greatest gift of our parents and of nature,—human life.'[2]

These sombre meditations hardly represent Diderot's habitual vein ; they are rather a reaction and a relief from the busy intensity with which he watches the scene, and is constantly putting interrogatories to

[1] xix. 82. [2] xix. 139.

human life, as day by day its motley circumstance passes before his eyes. We should scarcely suspect from his frequent repetitions of the mournful eternal chorus of the nullity of man and the vanity of all the things that are under the sun, how alert a watch he kept on incident and character, with what keen and open ear he listened for any curious note of pain, or voice of fine emotion, or odd perversity of fate. All this he does, not in the hard temper of a Balzac, not with the calm or pride of a Goethe, but with an overflowing fulness of spontaneous and uncontrollable sympathy. He is a sentimentalist in the rationalistic century, not with the sentimentalism of misanthropy, such as fired or soured Rousseau, but social, large-hearted, many-sided, careless of the wise rigours of morality. He is never callous nor neutral; on the contrary, he is always approving or disapproving, but not from the standards of the ethical text-books. The casuistry of feeling is of everlasting interest to him, and he is never tired of inventing imaginary cases, or pondering real ones, in which pliant feeling is invoked against the narrowness of duty. These are mostly in a kind of matter which modern taste hardly allows us to reproduce; nor, after all, is there much to be gained by turning the sanctities of human relationship with all their immeasurable bliss, their immeasurable woe, into the playthings of an idle dialectic. It is pleasanter, and for us English not less instructive than pleasant, to see this dreaming, restless, thrice ingenious spirit, half Titan of the skies, half gnome of the lower earth,

entering joyously or pitifully into the simple charm and natural tenderness of life as it comes and passes. Nothing delights him more than to hear or to tell such a story as this of Madame D'Epinay. She had given a small lad eighteen sous for a day's work. At night he went home without a farthing. When his mother asked him whether they had given him nothing for his work, he said No. The mother found out that this was untrue, and insisted on knowing what had become of the eighteen sous. The poor little creature had given them to an alehouse-keeper, where his father had been drinking all day; and so he had spared the worthy man a rough scene with his wife when he got home.[1]

From the pathos of kindly youth to the grace of loveable age the step is not far. 'To-day I have dined with a charming woman, who is only eighty years old. She is full of health and cheerfulness; her soul is still all gentleness and tenderness. She talks of love and friendship with the fire and sensibility of a girl of twenty. There were three men of us at table with her; she said to us, "My friends, a delicate conversation, a true and passionate look, a tear, a touched expression, those are the good things of the world; as for all besides, it is hardly worth talking of. There are certain things that were said to me when I was young, and that I remember to this day, and any one of those words is to be preferred before ten glorious deeds: by my faith, I believe if I heard

[1] xix. 107.

them even now, my old heart would beat the quicker." "Madame, the reason is that your heart has grown no older." "No, my son, you are right; it is as young as ever. It is not for having kept me alive so long that I thank God, but for having kept me kind-hearted, gentle, and full of feeling."'[1] All this was after Diderot's own heart, and he declares such a conversation to be worth more than all the hours of talk of politics and philosophy that he had been having a few days before with some English friends. We may understand how, as we shall presently see, a member of a society that could relish the beauty of such a scene would be likely to think Englishmen hard, surly, and cheerless.

His letters constantly offer us sensible and imaginative reflection. He amused himself in some country village by talking to an old man of eighty. 'I love children and old men; the latter seem to me like some singular creatures that have been spared by caprice of fate.' He meets some old schoolfellows at Langres, nearly all the rest having gone:—'Well, there are two things that warn us of our end, and set us musing—old ruins, and the short duration of those who began life with us.' He is taken by a host over-devoted to such joys, to walk among dung-heaps. 'After all,' he says, 'it ought not to offend one's sense. To an honest nose that has preserved its natural innocence, 'tis not a goat, but a bemusked and ambre-scented woman, who smelleth ill.'

[1] xix. 181.

'When I compare our friendships to our antipathies, I find that the first are thin, small, pinched; we know how to hate, but we do not know how to love.'

'A poet who becomes idle, does excellently well to be idle; he ought to be sure that it is not industry that fails, but that his gift is departing from him.'

'Comfort the miserable; that is the true way to console yourself for my absence. I recollect saying to the Baron, when he lost his first wife, and was sure that there was not another day's happiness left for him in this world, "Hasten out of doors, seek out the wretched, console them, and then you will pity yourself, if you dare."'[1]

'An infinitude of tyrannical things interpose between us and the duties of love and friendship; and we do nothing aright. A man is neither free for his ambition, nor free for his taste, nor free for his passion. And so we all live discontented with ourselves. One of the great inconveniences of the state of society is the multitude of our occupations, and above all the levity with which we make engagements to dispose of all our future happiness. We marry, we go into business, we have children, all before we have common sense.'[2]

After some equivocal speculations as to the conduct of a woman who, by the surrender of herself for a quarter of an hour to the desires of a powerful minister, wins an appointment for her husband and

[1] xix. 81. [2] xix. 149.

bread for her six children, he exclaims :—'In truth, I think Nature heeds neither good nor evil; she is wholly wrapped up in two objects, the preservation of the individual and the propagation of the species.'[1] True; but the moral distinction between right and wrong is so much wrung from the forces that Diderot here calls Nature.

The intellectual excitement in which he lived and the energy with which he promoted it, sought relief either in calm or else in the play of sensibility. 'A delicious repose,' he writes in one of his most harassed moments, 'a sweet book to read, a walk in some open and solitary spot, a conversation in which one discloses all one's heart, a strong emotion that brings the tears to one's eyes and makes the heart beat faster, whether it comes of some tale of generous action, or of a sentiment of tenderness, of health, of gaiety, of liberty, of indolence—there is the true happiness, nor shall I ever know any other.'

*A Point in Rhetoric.*—'Towards six in the evening the party broke up. I remained alone with D., and as we were talking about the Eloges on Descartes that had been sent in to the Academy, I made two remarks that pleased him upon eloquence. One, that it is a mistake to try to stir the passions before convincing the reason, and that the pathetic remains without effect, when it is not prepared by the syllogism. Second, that after the orator had touched me keenly, I could not endure that he should break in upon this melting of the soul with some violent stroke: that the pathetic insists on being followed by something moderate, weak, vague, that should leave room for no contention on my part.'[2]

[1] xix. 90. [2] xix. 163–4.

*D'Holbach's Impressions of England.*—'The Baron has returned from England. He started with the pleasantest anticipations, he had a most agreeable reception, he had excellent health, and yet he has returned out of humour and discontented; discontented with the country, which he found neither as populous nor as well cultivated as people say; discontented with the buildings, that are nearly all bizarre and Gothic; with the gardens, where the affectation of imitating nature is worse than the monotonous symmetry of art; with the taste that heaps up in the palaces what is first-rate, what is good, what is bad, what is detestable, all pell-mell. He is disgusted at the amusements, which have the air of religious ceremonies; with the men, on whose countenances you never see confidence, friendship, gaiety, sociability, but on every face the inscription, "*What is there in common between me and you?*"; disgusted with the great people, who are gloomy, cold, proud, haughty, and vain; and with the small people, who are hard, insolent, and barbarous. The only thing that I have heard him praise is the facility of travel: he says there is not a village, even on a cross-road, where you do not find four or five post-chaises and a score of horses ready to start. . . . There is no public education. The colleges—sumptuous buildings—palaces to be compared with the Tuileries, are occupied by rich idlers, who sleep and get drunk one part of the day, and the rest they spend in training, clumsily enough, a parcel of uncouth lads to be clergymen. . . . In the fine places that have been built for public amusements, you could hear a mouse run. A hundred stiff and silent women walk round and round an orchestra that is set up in the middle. The Baron compares these circuits to the seven processions of the Egyptians round the tomb of Osiris. A charming *mot* of my good friend Garrick, is that London is good for the English, but Paris is good for all the world. . . . There is a great mania for conversions and missionaries. Mr. Hume told me a story which will let you know what to think of these pretended conversions of cannibals and Hurons. A minister thought he had done a great stroke in this line; he had the vanity to wish to how his proselyte, and brought him to London. They question

his little Huron, and he answers to perfection. They take him to church, and administer the sacrament, where, as you know, the communion is in both kinds. Afterwards, the minister says to him, "Well, my son, do you not feel yourself more animated with the love of God? Does not the grace of the sacrament work within you? Is not all your soul warmed?" "Yes," says the Huron; "the wine does one good, but I think it would have done still better if it had been brandy."'[1]

*Two Cases of Conscience.*—'The curé said that unhappy lovers always talked about dying, but that it was very rare to find one who kept his word; still he had seen one case. It was that of a young man of family, called Soulpse. He fell in love with a young lady of beauty and of good character, but without money, and belonging to a dishonoured family. Her father was in the galleys for forgery. The young man, who foresaw all the opposition, and all the good grounds for opposition that he would have to encounter among his family, did all that he could to cure himself of his passion; but when he was assured of the uselessness of his efforts, he plucked up courage to open the matter to his parents, who wearied themselves with remonstrances. Our lover suddenly stopped them short, saying, "I know all that you have to say against me; I cannot disapprove of your reasons, which I should be the first to urge against my own son, if I had one. But consider whether you would rather have me dead or badly married; for it is certain that if I do not marry the woman that I love, I shall die of it." They treated this speech as it deserved; the result does not affect that. The young man fell sick, faded from day to day, and died. "But, Curé," said I, "in the place of the father, what would you have done?" "I would have called my son; I would have said: Soulpse has been your name hitherto; never forget that it is yours no more; and call yourself by what other name you please. Here is your lawful share of our property; marry the woman you love, so far from here that I may never hear speak of you again, and God bless you." "For my

[1] Sept. 20, 1765; xix. 179—187.

part," said old Madame D'Esclavelles, "if I had been the mother of the young madman, I would have done exactly as his father did, and let him die." And upon this there was a tremendous division of opinion, and an uproar that made the room ring again.

'The dispute lasted a long time, and would be going on now, if the curé had not broken it off by putting to us another case. A young priest, discontented with his profession, flees to England, apostatizes, marries according to the law, and has children. After a certain time he longs for his native country; he comes back to France with his children and his wife. After that, again, he is stricken by remorse; he returns to his religion, has scruples about his marriage, and thinks of separating from his wife. He opens his heart to our curé, who finds the case very embarrassing, and not venturing to decide it, refers him to casuists and lawyers. They all decide that he cannot, with a sure conscience, remain with his wife. When the separation, which the wife opposed with all her might, was about to be legally effected—rather against the wishes of our curé—the husband fell dangerously ill. When he knew that he could not recover, he said to the curé: "My friend, I wish to make public amends for my backsliding, to receive the sacraments, and to die in the hospital; be kind enough to have me taken there." "I will take care to do no such thing," the curé replied to him. "This woman is innocent; she married you according to law; she knew nothing of the obstacles that existed. And these children, what share have they in your sin? You are the only wrongdoer, and it is they who are to be punished! Your wife will be disgraced, your children will be declared illegitimate, and what is the gain of it all?" And the good curé stuck to his text. He confessed his man, the illness grew worse, he administered the last sacraments. The man died, and his wife and children remained in possession of the titles they had. We all approved the curé's wisdom, and Grimm insisted on having his portrait taken.' [1]

*Chinese Superiority.*—'Apropos of the Chinese, do you know

[1] xviii. 476—8.

that with them nobility ascends, and descends never? It is the children who ennoble their ancestors, and not the ancestors the children. And upon my word, that is most sensible. We are greater poets, greater philosophers, greater orators, greater architects, greater astronomers, greater geometers, than these good people; but they understand better than we the science of good sense and virtue; and if peradventure that science should happen to be the first of all sciences, they would be right in saying that they have two eyes, and we have only one, and all the rest of the world is blind.'[1]

*Why Women write good Letters.*—'She writes admirably, really admirably. That is because good style is in the heart; and that is why so many women talk and write like angels without ever having learnt either to talk or to write, and why so many pedants will both talk and write ill all the days of their life, though they were never weary of studying,—only without learning.'[2]

'A little adventure has just happened here that proves that all our fine sermons on intolerance have as yet produced but poor fruit. A young man of respectable birth, some say apprentice to an apothecary, others to a grocer, took it into his head to go through a course of chemistry; his master consented, on condition that he should pay for board; the lad agreed. At the end of the quarter the master demanded the money, and it was paid. Soon after, another demand from the master; the apprentice replied that he barely owed a single quarter. The master denied that the first quarter had been paid. The affair was taken into court. The master is put on his oath, and swears. He had no sooner perjured himself than the apprentice produced

[1] xviii. 479. Comte writes more seriously somewhat in the same sense:—'For thirty centuries the priestly castes of China, and still more of India, have been watching our Western transition; to them it must appear mere agitation, as puerile as it is tempestuous, with nothing to harmonise its different phases, but their common inroad upon unity.'—*Positive Polity*, iv. 11. (English Translation).

[2] xix. 233.

his receipt, and the master was straightway fined and disgraced. He was a scoundrel who deserved it, but the apprentice was a rash fellow, whose victory was bought at a price deeper than life. He had received, in payment or otherwise, from some colporteur, two copies of *Christianity Unveiled*, and one of them he had sold to his master. The master informs against him. The colporteur, his wife, and his apprentice, are all three arrested, and they have just been pilloried, whipped, and branded, and the apprentice condemned to nine years of the galleys, the colporteur to five years, and the woman to the hospital for life. . . . Do you see the meaning of this judgment? A colporteur brings me a prohibited book. If I buy more than one copy, I am declared to be encouraging unlawful trading, and exposed to a frightful prosecution. You have read the *Man with Forty Crowns*,[1] and will hardly be able to guess why it is placed under the ban in the judgment I am telling you of. It is in consequence of the profound resentment that our lords and masters feel about a certain article, *Tyrant*, in the *Philosophical Dictionary*. They will never forgive Voltaire for saying that it was better to have to do with a single wild beast, which one could avoid, than with a band of little subaltern tigers who are incessantly getting between your legs. . . . To return to those two unfortunate wretches whom they have condemned to the galleys. When they come out, what will become of them? There will be nothing left for them to do, save to turn highway robbers. The ignominious penalties, which take away all resource from a man, are worse than the capital punishment that takes away his life.'[2]

*Method and Genius: an Apologue.*—'There was a question between Grimm and M. Le Roy of creative genius and co-ordinating method. Grimm detests method; according to him, it is the pedantry of letters. Those who can only arrange, would do as well to remain idle; those who can only get instruction from what has been arranged, would do as well to remain ignorant. What

[1] Voltaire's satire on the Economists.

[2] Oct. 8, 1768; xix. 283.

necessity is there for so many people knowing anything else besides their trade? They said a great many things that I don't report to you, and they would be saying things still, if the Abbé Galiani had not interrupted them :—

"My friends, I remember a fable : pray listen to it. One day, in the depths of a forest, a dispute arose between a Nightingale and a Cuckoo. Each prizes its own gift. What bird, said the Cuckoo, has a song so easy, so simple, so natural, so measured, as mine?

What bird, said the Nightingale, has a song sweeter, more varied, more brilliant, more touching, than mine?

*The Cuckoo :* I say few things, but they are things of weight, of order, and people retain them.

*The Nightingale :* I love to use my voice, but I am always fresh, and I never weary. I enchant the woods ; the Cuckoo makes them dismal. He is so attached to the lessons of his mother, that he would not dare to venture a single note that he had not taken from her. Now for me, I recognise no master. I laugh at rules. What comparison between his pedantic method and my glorious bursts?

The Cuckoo tried several times to interrupt the Nightingale. But nightingales always go on singing, and never listen ; that is rather their weakness. Ours, carried away by his ideas, followed them with rapidity, without paying the least attention to the answers of his rival.

So after some talk and counter-talk, they agreed to refer their quarrel to the judgment of a third animal. But where were they to find this third, equally competent and impartial? It is not so easy to find a good judge. They sought on all sides. As they crossed a meadow, they spied an Ass, one of the gravest and most solemn that ever was seen. Since the creation of the world, no ass had ever had such long ears. 'Ah,' said the Cuckoo, 'our luck is excellent ; our quarrel is a matter of ears : here is our judge. God Almighty made him for the very purpose!'

The Ass went on browsing. He little thought that one day he would have to decide a question of music. But Providence

amuses itself with this and many another thing. Our two birds bow very low, compliment him upon his gravity and his judgment, explain the subject of their dispute, and beseech him, with all deference, to listen to their case and decide.

But the Ass, hardly turning his heavy head and without losing a single toothsome blade, makes them a sign with his ears that he is hungry, and that he does not hold his court to-day. The birds persist; the Ass goes on browsing. At last his hunger was appeased. There were some trees planted by the edge of the meadow. 'Now, if you like,' said he, 'you go there, I will follow; you shall sing, I will digest; I will listen, and then I'll give you my opinion.'

The birds instantly fly away, and perch on branches. The Ass follows them with the air and the step of a chief justice crossing Westminster Hall: he stretches himself flat on the ground, and says, 'Begin, the court listens.'

Says the Cuckoo: 'My lord, there is not a word to lose. I beg of you to seize carefully the character of my singing; above all things, deign, my lord, to mark its artifice and its method.' Then filling its throat, and flapping its wings at each note, it sang out 'Coucou, coucou, coucou, coucou, coucou, coucou.' And after having combined this in every possible way, it fell silent.

The Nightingale, without any prelude, pours forth his voice at once, launches into the most daring modulations, pursues the freshest and most delicate melodies, cadences, pauses, and trills; now you heard the notes murmuring at the bottom of its throat, like the ripple of the brook as it loses itself among the pebbles; now you heard them rising and gradually swelling and filling the air, and lingering long-drawn in the skies. It was tender, glad, brilliant, pathetic; but his music was not made for everybody.

Carried away by enthusiasm, he would be singing still; but the Ass, who had already yawned more than once, stopped him, and said, 'I suspect that all you have been singing there is uncommonly fine, but I don't understand a word of it: it strikes me as bizarre, incoherent, and confused. It may be you are more

scientific than your rival; but he is more methodic than you, and for my part, I'm for method.'

'And then the abbé, addressing M. Le Roy, and pointing to Grimm with his finger: "There," he said, "is the nightingale, and you the cuckoo; and I am the ass, who decide in your favour. Good-night."

'The abbé's stories are capital, but he acts in a way that makes them better still. You would have died with laughing to see him stretch his neck into the air, and imitate the fine note of the nightingale, then fill his throat, and take up the hoarse tone for the cuckoo; and all that naturally, and without effort. He is pantomime from head to foot.'[1]

*Conversation.*—''Tis a singular thing, conversation, especially when the company is tolerably large. Look at the roundabout circuits we took; the dreams of a patient in delirium are not more incongruous. Still, just as there is nothing absolutely unconnected in the head either of a man who dreams or of a lunatic, so all hangs together in conversation; but it would often be extremely hard to find the imperceptible links that have brought so many disparate ideas together. A man lets fall a word which he detaches from what has gone before, and what has followed in his head; another does the same, and then let him catch the thread who can. A single physical quality may lead the mind that is engaged upon it to an infinity of different things. Take a colour—yellow, for instance; gold is yellow, silk is yellow, care is yellow, bile is yellow, straw is yellow; to how many other threads does not this thread answer? Madness, dreaming, the rambling of conversation, all consist in passing from one object to another, through the medium of some common quality.'[2]

*Annihilation.*—'The conversation took a serious turn. They spoke of the horror that we all feel for annihilation.

"Ah," cried Father Hoop, "be good enough to leave me out, if you please. I have been too uncomfortable the first time to have

[1] xviii. 509. [2] xviii. 513.

any wish to come back. If they would give me an immortality of bliss for a single day of purgatory, I would not take it. The best that can befall us is to cease to be."

'This set me musing, and it seemed to me that so long as I was in good health I should agree with Father Hoop ; but that, at the last instant, I should perhaps purchase the happiness of living again by a thousand, nay, ten thousand, years of hell. Ah, my dear, if I thought that I should see you again, I should soon persuade myself of what a daughter once succeeded in persuading her father on his deathbed. He was an old usurer; a priest had sworn to him that he would be damned unless he made restitution. He resolved to comply, and calling his daughter to his bedside, said to her: "My child, you thought I should leave you very rich, and so I should; but the man there insists that I shall burn in hell-fire for ever if I die without making restitution." "You are talking nonsense, father, with your restitution and your damnation," the daughter answered; "with your character you will not have been damned ten years before you will be perfectly used to it."

'This struck him as true, and he died without making restitution.

'And so behold us launched into a discussion on life and death, on the world and its alleged Creator.

'Someone remarked that whether there be a God or no, it is impossible to introduce that device either into nature or into a discussion without darkening it.

'Another said that if a single supposition explained all the phenomena, it would not follow from this that it is true; for who knows whether the general order only allows of one reason? What, then, must we think of a supposition which, so far from resolving the one difficulty for the sake of which people imagined it, only makes an infinity of others spring up from it?

'I believe, my dear, that our chat by the fireside still amuses you; so I go on.

'Among these difficulties is one that has been proposed ever since the world has been a world: 'tis that men suffer without having

deserved suffering. There has been no answer to it yet. 'Tis the incompatibility of physical and moral evil with the nature of the Eternal Being. This is how the dilemma is put: it is either impotence or bad will; impotence, if he wished to hinder evil and could not; bad will, if he could have hindered it and did not will it. A child would understand that. It is this that has led people to imagine the fault of the first father of us all, original sin, future rewards and punishments, the incarnation, immortality, the two principles of the Manicheans, the Ormuzd and Ahriman of the Persians, the doctrine of emanations, the empire of light and darkness, metempsychosis, optimism, and other absurdities that have found credit among the different nations of the earth, where there is always to be found some hollow vision of a dream by way of answer to a clear, precise, and definite fact.

'On such occasions what is the part of good sense? Why, the part that we took: whatever the optimists may say, we will reply to them that if the universe could not exist without sensible creatures, nor sensible creatures without pain, there was nothing to do but to leave chaos at peace. They had got on very well for a whole eternity without any such piece of folly.

'The world a piece of folly! Ah, my dear, a glorious folly for all that! 'Tis, according to some of the inhabitants of Malabar, one of the seventy-four comedies with which the Eternal amuses himself.

'Leibnitz, the founder of optimism, tells somewhere how there was in the Temple of Memphis a high pyramid of globes placed one above the others; how a priest, being asked by a traveller about this pyramid and its globes, made answer that these were all the possible worlds, and that the most perfect of them all was at the summit; how the traveller, curious to see this most perfect of all possible worlds, mounted to the top of the pyramid, and the first thing that caught his eyes, as they turned towards the globe at the summit, was Tarquin outraging Lucretia.'[1]

Almost every letter reminds us that we are in the

[1] xviii. 511—3.

very height of the disputing, arguing, rationalistic century. Diderot delighted in this kind of argument, as Socrates or Dr. Johnson delighted in it. He was above all others the archetype and representative of the passion for moralising, analysing, and philosophizing which made the epoch what it was, but the rest of the world was all in the same vein. If he came to Paris in a coach from the country, he found a young lady in it, eager to demonstrate that serious passions are nowadays merely ridiculous; that people only promise themselves pleasure, which they find or not, as the case may be; that thus they spare themselves all the broken oaths of old days. 'I took the liberty of saying that I was still a man of those old days. "*So much the worse for you*," she said; "*you either deceive or are deceived, and one is as bad as the other.*"'[1] If Grimm and Madame d'Epinay and he were together, they discussed ethics from morning to night; Diderot always on the side of the view that made most for the dignity and worth of human nature. Grimm is described on one of these occasions as having rather displeased Madame d'Epinay: 'he was not sufficiently ready to disapprove the remark of a man of our acquaintance, who said that it was right to observe the most scrupulous probity with one's friends, but that it was mere dupery to treat other people better than they would treat us. We maintained, she and I, that it was right and necessary to be honest and good with all the world without distinction.'[2]

[1] xix. 244. [2] xviii. 459.

Here is another picture of discussion, with an introduction that is thoroughly characteristic of Diderot's temper :—

'This man looks at the human race only on its dark side. He does not believe in virtuous actions; he disparages them, and denies them. If he tells a story, it is always about something scandalous and abominable. I have just told you of the two women of my acquaintance, of whom he took occasion to speak as ill as he could to Madame Le Gendre. They have their defects, no doubt; but they have also their good qualities. Why be silent about the good qualities, and only pick out the defects? There is in all that a kind of envy that wounds me—me who read men as I read authors, and who never burden my memory except with things that are good to know and good to imitate. The conversation between Suard and Madame Le Gendre had been very vivacious. They sought the reasons why persons of sensibility were so readily, so strongly, so deliciously moved at the story of a good action. Suard maintained that it was due to a sixth sense that nature had endowed us with, to judge the good and the beautiful. They pressed to know what I thought of it. I answered that this sixth sense was a chimæra; that all was the result of experience in us; that we learnt from our earliest infancy what it was in our instinct to hide or to show. When the motives of our actions, our judgments, our demonstrations, are present to us, we have what is called science; when they are not present to our memory, we have only what is called taste, instinct, and tact. The reasons for showing ourselves sensible to the recital of good actions are numberless; we reveal a quality that is worthy of infinite esteem; we promise to others our esteem, if ever they deserve it by any uncommon or worthy piece of conduct . . . . Independently of all these views of interest, we have a notion of order, and a taste for order, which we cannot resist, and which drags us along in spite of ourselves. Every fine action implies sacrifice;

and it is impossible for us not to pay our homage to self-sacrifice'—and so forth.[1]

Alas, all these endless debates and dialogues lacked the inspiration and the charm with which the genius of a Plato could adorn the narrowest quibbling between Socrates and a Sophist. 'Diderot,' said Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, 'is an extraordinary man; he is out of his place in society; he was meant for the chief of a sect, a Greek philosopher, instructing youth. He pleases me greatly, but his manner does not touch my soul.'[2] And we understand this. People disputed what virtue is, but the dispute failed in that undefined spirit which makes men love and adore virtue. Goodness is surrounded with no spacious beauty, it is clothed with none of the high associations of spontaneous piety. The discussion seems close, stifling, and airless. Yet ages of loftier speech and greater spirituality have not always been so favourable to the affections or to the attachments of life. In amiability that society has never been surpassed; in sincerity of mutual sympathy and kindliness of mutual regard. The common irregularity of morals was seen to be perfectly compatible not merely with a desire to please, but with an honest anxiety to serve.

Of the thorough excellence of Diderot's heart, of his friendliness and unwearied helpfulness, time would fail us to tell. Men's conceptions of friendship differ as widely as their conceptions of other things. Some

[1] xix. 259.

[2] *Lettres de Mdlle. de Lespinasse*, viii., p. 20. (Ed. Asse. 1876.)

look to friendship for absolute exemption from all criticism, and for a mutual admiration without limit or conditions. Others mistake it for the right of excessive criticism, in season and out of season. Diderot was content to take friendship as the right, the duty, or the privilege of rendering services, without thought of requiring either them or gratitude for them back in return. This we must admit to be rare. No man that ever lived showed more sterling interest in furthering the affairs of others around him. He seemed to admit every claim on his time, his purse, and his talents. A stranger called upon him one day and begged Diderot to write for him a puffing advertisement of a new pomatum. Diderot with a laugh sat down and wrote what was wanted. The graver occasions of life found him no less ready. Damilaville lost one of his children, and his wife was inconsolable. It was Diderot who was summoned, and who cheerfully went for days together to soothe and divert her mind. For his correspondent and for us he makes the tedium of his story beautiful by recalling the fine saying of a grief-stricken woman in Metastasio, when they tried to console her by the example of Abraham, who was ready even to slay his son at the command of God :—*Ah, God would never have given such an order to his mother!*

The abbé Le Monnier wrote the worst verses that ever were read, a play that was instantly damned, and a translation of Terence that came into the world dead. But bad writers are always the most shameless in-

truders on the time of good critics, and we find Diderot willingly spending hours over the abbé's handwriting, which was as wretched as what he wrote, and then spending hours more in offering critical observations on verses that were only fit to be thrown into the fire. The abbé, being absent from Paris and falling short of money, requested Diderot to sell for him his copy of the Encyclopædia. 'I have sold your Encyclopædia,' said Diderot, 'but did not get so much as I expected, for the rumour spread abroad by those scoundrels of Swiss booksellers, that they were going to issue a revised edition, has done us some harm. Send for the nine hundred and fifty livres (about £40) that belong to you, and if that is not enough for your expenses, beside the drawer that holds your money is another that holds mine. I don't know how much there is, but I will count it all at your disposal.'[1]

One Jodin, again, was a literary hack who had been employed on the Encyclopædia. He died, leaving a foolish and extravagant widow, and a perverse and violent daughter. The latter went on to the stage, and Diderot took as much trouble in advising her, in seeking appointments for her, in executing her commissions, in investing her earnings, in dealing with her relatives, as if he had been her own father. If his counsels on her art are admirable, there is something that moves us with more than admiration in the good sense, the right feeling, the worthiness of his counsels

[1] Aug. 1, 1769; xix. 365.

on conduct. And Diderot did not merely moralise at large. All that he says is real, pointed, and apt for circumstance and person. The petulant damsel to whom they were addressed would not be likely to yawn over the sharp remonstrances, the vigorous plain speaking, the downright honesty and visible sincerity of his friendliness. It appears that she had sense enough not to be offended with the frankness of her father's old employer, for after he has plainly told her that she is violent, rude, vain, and not always too truthful, she still writes to him from Warsaw, from Dresden, from Bordeaux, praying him to procure a certain bracelet for her, to arrange her mother's affairs, to find a good investment for twelve thousand francs. When the mother was in the depths of indigence, Diderot insisted that she should take her meals at his own table. And all this for no other reason than that the troublesome pair had been thrown in his way by the chance of human circumstance, and needed help which he was able, not without sacrifice, to give. Mademoiselle Jodin was hardly worthy of so good a friend. Her parents were Protestants, and as she was a convert, she enjoyed a pension of some eight pounds a year. That did not prevent her from one day indulging in some too sprightly sallies, as the host was carried along the street. For this she was put into prison, and that is our last glimpse of the light creature.[1]

Men knew how to be as wrong-headed and as grace-

[1] (1765—1769) xix. 381—412. Also, p. 318.

less as women. We have already mentioned the name of Landois in connexion with Diderot's article on Liberty.[1] Landois seems to have been a marvel of unreasonableness, but he was a needy man of letters, and that was enough to make Diderot ready to bear with him and to succour him. He wound up an epistle abounding, after the manner of the worthless failures of the world, in reproaches and grievances against his benefactor, with a cool request about a manuscript that was full of dangerous matter. 'Why, that,' replied Diderot, 'is a work that might well be the ruin of me; and it is after you have on two separate occasions charged me with the most atrocious and deliberate offences towards you, that you now propose that I should revise and print your work. You know that I have a wife and child, that I am a marked man, that you are putting me into the class of hardened offenders; never mind, you don't think of one of these things. You take me for an imbecile, or else you are one. But you are no imbecile. . . . . I see through men's designs, and often enough I lend myself to them, without deigning to disabuse them as to the stupidity which they impute to me. It is enough if I perceive in their design some great service for them, and not an excess of inconvenience for myself. It is not I who am the fool, so often as people take me for one.' Diderot then seems half to forget to whom he is writing, and pours out what reads like a long soliloquy on morals, conduct, and the philosophy

[1] See above, p. 231.

of life. He insists that man, with all his high-flying freedom of will, is but a little link in a great chain of events. He is a creature to be modified from without; hence the good effects of example, discourse, education, pleasures, pains, greatness, misery. Hence a sort of philosophy of commiseration, which attaches us strongly to the good, and irritates us no more against the bad than against a wind-storm that fills our eyes with dust. If you adopt such principles as these, they will reconcile you with others and yourself; you will neither praise nor blame yourself for what you are. To reproach others with nothing, to repent yourself of nothing—these are the two first steps towards wisdom; this is the philosophy that reconciles us with the human race and with life.[1]

When he was in the very midst of all the toil and strife that the Encyclopædia brought upon him, he could not refuse to spend three whole days in working like a galley-slave at an account of an important discovery that had been made by some worthy people with whom he was acquainted slightly. 'But while I was busy about their affairs, my own are at a standstill. I write to you from Le Breton's, with a mass of uncorrected proofs before me, and the printers crying out for them. Still Grimm must be right, when he says that time is not a thing of which we are free to dispose at our own fancy; that we owe it first and foremost to our friends, our relations, our daily duties; and that in the lavish profusion of our time on people

[1] June, 1756; xix. 433—36.

who are indifferent, there is nothing less than vice.'[1] Yet in spite of Grimm's most just remonstrance, the lavish profusion always went on as before.

There was one man, and only one man, for whose perverse and intractable spirit Diderot's most friendly patience, helpfulness, and devotion, were no match. I have already, in dealing with Rousseau,[2] said as much of the quarrel which he picked with Diderot as the matter requires, and it would be superfluous to go over the ground again from another side. Whether we listen to Rousseau's story or to Diderot's story, our judgment on what happened remains unchanged. We have already seen how warm and close an intimacy subsisted between them in the days when Diderot was a prisoner at Vincennes (1749).[3] When Rousseau made up his mind to leave Paris and turn hermit (1756), there was a loud outcry from the sociable group at Holbach's. They said to him, in the less theological dialect of their day, what Sir Walter Scott had said to Ballantine when Ballantine thought of leaving Edinburgh, that, 'when our Saviour himself was to be led into temptation, the first thing the Devil thought of was to get him into the wilderness.' Diderot remonstrated rather more loudly than Rousseau's other friends, but there was no breach, and even no coolness. What sort of humours were bred by solitude in Rousseau's wayward mind we know, and the Confessions tell us how for a year and a half he was silently brooding over fancied slights and per-

[1] Aug. 1762; xix. 112. [2] In *Rousseau*, Ch. vii. [3] See above, p. 109.

haps real pieces of heedlessness. Grimm, who was Diderot's closest friend next to Mademoiselle Voland, despised Rousseau, and Rousseau detested Grimm. 'Grimm,' he one day said to a disciple, 'is the only man whom I have ever been able to hate.' Madame d'Epinay was compelled to go to Geneva for her health, and Grimm easily persuaded Diderot that Rousseau was bound by all the ties of gratitude to accompany his benefactress on the expedition. Diderot wrote to the hermit a very strong letter to this effect; it made Rousseau furious. He declined the urgent counsel, he quarrelled outright and violently with Grimm, and after an angry and confusing interview with Diderot, all intercourse ceased with him also. 'That man,' wrote Diderot, on the evening of this, their last interview, 'intrudes into my work; he fills me with trouble, and I feel as if I were haunted by a damned soul at my side. May I never see him more; he would make me believe in devils and hell.'[1] And writing afterwards to some friend at Geneva, he recalls the days when he used to pour out the talk of intimacy 'with the man who has buried himself at the bottom of a wood, where his soul has been soured and his moral nature has been corrupted. Yet how I pity him! Imagine that I used to love him, that I remember those old days of friendship, and that I see him now with crime on one side and remorse on the other, with deep waters in front of him. He will many a time be the torment of my thought; our common

[1] Dec. 1757; xix. 446.

friends have judged between him and me; I have kept them all, and to him there remains not one.'[1] It was not in Diderot's nature to bear malice, and when eight years later Rousseau passed through Paris on his ill-starred way to England and the Derbyshire hills, Diderot described the great pleasure that a visit from Rousseau would give to him. 'Ah, I do well,' he says, 'not to let the access to my heart be too easy; when anybody has once found a place in it, he does not leave it without making a grievous rent; 'tis a wound that can never be thoroughly cauterised.'[2]

It is needless to remind the neutral reader that Rousseau uses exactly the same kind of language about his heart. For this is the worst of sentimentalism, that it is so readily bent into a substitution of indulgence to one's self for upright and manly judgment about others. Still we may willingly grant that in the present rupture of a long friendship, it was not Diderot who was the real offender. *Too many honest people would be in the wrong,* he most truly said, *if Jean Jacques were in the right.*

Of Grimm, I have already said elsewhere as much as is needful to be said.[3] His judgment in matters of conduct and character was cool and rather hard, but it was generally sound. He had a keen eye for what was hollow in the pretensions of the society in which he lived. Above all, he had the keen eye of his countrymen for his own interests, and for the use

[1] xix. 449. [2] Dec. 20, 1765; xix. 210.
[3] See *Rousseau*, Ch. vii.

which he could make of other people. The best thing that we know in his favour, is that he should have won the friendship of Diderot. Diderot's attachment to Grimm seems like an exaggeration of the excesses of the epoch of sentimentalism in Germany.

He pines for a letter from him, as he pined for letters from Mademoiselle Voland. If Grimm had been absent for a few months, their meeting was like a scene in a melodrama. 'With what ardour we enclasped one another. My heart was swimming. I could not speak a word, nor could he. We embraced without speaking, and I shed tears. We were not expecting him. We were all at dessert when he was announced, "*Here is M. Grimm.*" "*M. Grimm,*" I exclaimed, with a loud cry; and starting up, I ran to him and fell on his neck. He sat down, and ate a poor meal, you may be sure. As for me, I could not open my lips either to eat or to speak. He was next to me, and I kept pressing his hand and gazing at him.'[1] Mademoiselle Voland appears on some occasion to have compared Diderot with his friend. 'No more comparison, I beseech you, my good friend, between Grimm and me. I console myself for his superiority by frankly recognising it. I am vain of the victory that I thus gain over my self-love, and you must not deprive me of that little advantage.'[2] Grimm, however, knew better than Diderot how to unite German sentimentalism with a steady selfishness. 'I have just received from Grimm,' writes good-

[1] Oct. 9, 1759; xviii. 397. [2] Nov. 6, 1760; xix. 17.

natured Diderot, 'a note that wounds my too sensitive spirit. I had promised to write him a few lines on the exhibition of pictures in the Salon; he writes to me that if it is not ready to-morrow, it will be of no use. I will be revenged for this kind of hardness, and in a way that becomes me. I worked all day yesterday, and all day to-day. I shall pass the night at work, and all to-morrow, and at nine o'clock he shall receive a volume of manuscript.'[1] We may doubt whether his German friend would feel the force of a rebuke so extremely convenient to himself.

While Grimm was amusing himself at Madame D'Epinay's country-house, Diderot was working at the literary correspondence which Grimm was accustomed to send to St. Petersburg and the courts of Germany. While Grimm was hunting pensions and honorary titles at Saxe-Gotha, or currying favour with Frederick and waiting for gold boxes at Potsdam, Diderot was labouring like any journeyman in writing on his behalf accounts and reviews of the books, good, bad, and indifferent, with which the Paris market teemed. When there were no new books to talk about, the ingenious man, with the resource of the born journalist, gave extracts from books that did not exist.[2] When we hear of Paris being the centre of European intelligence and literary activity, we may understand that these circular letters of Grimm and Diderot were the machinery by which the light of Paris was diffused among darker lands. It is not too much to say that

[1] Sept. 17, 1761; xix. 47.

[2] Sept. 17, 1769; xix. 320.

no contemporary record so intelligent, so independent, so vigorous, so complete, exists of any other remarkable literary epoch.

The abbé Raynal, of whom we shall have more to say in a later chapter, had founded this counterpart of a modern review in 1747, and he sent a copy of it in manuscript once a month to anybody who cared to pay three hundred francs a year. In 1753 Raynal had handed the business over to Grimm, and by him it was continued until 1790, twelve years beyond the life of Voltaire and of Rousseau, and six years after the death of the ablest, most original, and most ungrudging of all those who gave him their help.

An interesting episode in Diderot's life brought him into direct relations with one of the two crowned patrons of the revolutionary literature, who were philosophers in profession and the most arbitrary of despots in their practice. Frederick the Great, whose literary taste was wholly in the vein of the conventional French classic, was never much interested by Diderot's writing, and felt little curiosity about him. Catherine of Russia was sufficiently an admirer of the Encyclopædia to be willing to serve its much-enduring builder. In 1765, when the enterprise was in full course, Diderot was moved by a provident anxiety about the future of his daughter. He had no dower for her in case a suitor should present himself, and he had but a scanty substance to leave her in case of his own death. The income of the property which he inherited from his father was regularly handed to his

wife for the maintenance of the household. His own earnings, as we have seen, were of no considerable amount. There are men of letters, he wrote in 1767, to whom their industry has brought as much as twenty, thirty, eighty, or even a hundred thousand francs. As for himself, he thought that perhaps the fruit of his literary occupations would come to about forty thousand crowns, or some five thousand pounds sterling. 'One could not amass wealth,' he said pensively, and his words are of grievous generality for the literary tribe, 'but one could acquire ease and comfort, if only these sums were not spread over so many years, did not vanish away as they were gathered in, and had not all been scattered and spent by the time that years had multiplied, wants grown more numerous, eyes grown dim, and mind become blunted and worn.'[1] This was his own case. His earnings were never thriftily husbanded. Diderot could not deny himself a book or an engraving that struck his fancy, though he was quite willing to make a present of it to any appreciative admirer the day after he had bought it. He was extravagant in hiring a hackney-coach where another person would have gone on foot, and not seldom the coachman stood for half a day at the door, while the heedless passenger was expatiating within upon truth, virtue, and the fine arts, unconscious of the passing hours and the swollen reckoning. Hence, when the time came, there were no savings. We have to take a man with the defects of his qualities, and as Diderot

[1] *Lettres sur le Commerce de la Librairie.* xviii. 47.

would not have been Diderot if he had taken time to save money, there is no more to be said.

When it became his duty to provide for his daughter, between 1763 and 1765, he resolved to sell his library. Through Grimm, Diderot's position reached the ears of the Empress of Russia. Her agent was instructed to buy the library at the price fixed by its possessor, and Diderot received sixteen thousand livres, a sum equal to something more than seven hundred pounds sterling of that day. The Empress added a handsome bounty to the bargain. She requested Diderot to consider himself the custodian of the new purchase on her behalf, and to receive a thousand livres a year for his pains. The salary was paid for fifty years in advance, and so Diderot drew at once what must have seemed to him the royal sum of between two and three thousand pounds sterling—a figure that would have to be trebled, or perhaps quadrupled, to convey its value in the money of our own day. We may wish for the honour of letters that Diderot had been able to preserve his independence. But pensions were the custom of the time. Voltaire, though a man of solid wealth, did not disdain an allowance from Frederick the Great, and complained shrilly because it was irregularly paid at the very time when he knew that Frederick was so short of money that he was driven to melt his plate. D'Alembert also had his pension from Berlin, and Grimm, as we have seen, picked up unconsidered trifles in half of the northern courts. Frederick offered

an allowance to Rousseau, but that strange man, in whom so much that was simple, touching, and lofty, mingled with all that was wayward and perverse, declined to tax the king's strained finances.[1]

It would shed an instructive light upon authorship and the characters of famous men, if we could always know the relations between a writer and his booksellers. Diderot's point of view in considering the great modern enginery and processes of producing and selling books was invariably, like his practice, that of a man of sound common sense and sterling integrity. We have seen in the previous chapter something of the difficulties of the trade in those days. The booksellers were a close guild of three hundred and sixty members, and the printers were limited to thirty-six. Their privileges brought them little fortune. They were of the lowest credit and repute, and most of them were hardly better than beggars. It was said that not a dozen out of the three hundred and sixty could afford to have more than one coat for his back. They were bound hand and foot by vexatious rules, and their market was gradually spoiled by a band of men whom they hated as interlopers, but whom the public had some reason to bless. No bookseller nor printer could open an establishment outside of the quarter of the University, or on the north side of the bridges. The restriction, which was as old as the introduction of printing into France, had its origin in the days when the visits of the royal inspectors to the presses

[1] See *Rousseau*, Ch. xi.

and bookshops were constant and rigorous, and it saved the time of the officials to have all their business close to their hand. Inasmuch, however, as people insisted on having books, and as they did not always choose to be at the pains of making a long journey to the region of the booksellers' shops, hawkers sprang into existence. Men bought books or got them on credit from the booksellers, and carried them in a bag over their shoulders to the houses of likely customers, just as a peddler now carries laces and calico, cheap silks and trumpery jewellery, round the country villages. Even poor women filled their aprons with a few books, took them across the bridges, and knocked at people's doors. This would have been well enough in the eyes of the guild, if the hawkers had been content to buy from the legally patented booksellers. But they began secretly to turn publishers in a small way on their own account. Contraband was here, as always, the natural substitute for free trade. They both issued pirated editions of their own, and they became the great purchasers and distributors of the pirated editions that came in vast bales from Switzerland, from Holland, from the Pope's country of Avignon. To their craft or courage the public owed its copies of works whose circulation was forbidden by the government. The Persian Letters of Montesquieu was a prohibited book, but, for all that, there were a hundred editions of it before it had been published twenty years, and every schoolboy could find a copy on the quays for a dozen half-

pence. Bayle's Thoughts on the Comet, Rousseau's Emilius and Heloïsa, Helvétius's L'Esprit, and a thousand other forbidden pieces were in every library, both public and private. The Social Contract, printed over and over again in endless editions, was sold for a shilling under the vestibule of the king's own palace. When the police were in earnest, the hawker ran horrible risks, as we saw a few pages further back; for these risks he recompensed himself by his prices. A prohibition by the authorities would send a book up within four and twenty hours from half-a-crown to a couple of louis. This only increased the public curiosity, quickened the demand, led to clandestine reprints, and extended the circulation of the book that was nominally suppressed. When the condemnation of a book was cried through the streets, the compositors said, 'Good, another edition!' There was no favour that an unknown author could have asked from the magistrates so valuable to him, as a little decree condemning his work to be torn up and burnt at the foot of the great staircase of the Palace of Justice.[1]

It was this practical impossibility of suppression that interested both the guild of publishers and the government in the conditions of the book trade. The former were always harassed, often kept poor, and sometimes ruined, by systematic piracy and the invasion of their rights. The government, on the other hand, could not help seeing that, as the books could not pos-

[1] Diderot's *Lettre sur le Commerce de la Librairie* (1767). *Œuv.*, xviii.

sibly be kept out of the realm, it was to be regretted that their production conferred no benefit on the manufacturing industry of the realm, the composition, the printing, the casting of type, the fabrication of paper, the preparation of leather and vellum, the making of machines and tools. When Bayle's Dictionary appeared, it was the rage of Europe. Hundreds of the ever-renowned folios found their way into France, and were paid for by French money. The booksellers addressed the minister, and easily persuaded him of the difference, according to the economic light of those days, between an exchange of money against paper, compared with an exchange of paper against paper. The minister replied that this was true, but still that the gates of the kingdom would never be opened to a single copy of Bayle. 'The best thing to do,' he said, 'is to print it here.' And the third edition of Bayle was printed in France, much to the contentment of the French printers, binders, and booksellers.

In 1761, the booksellers were afflicted by a new alarm. Foreign pirates and domestic hawkers were doing them mischief enough. But in that year the government struck a blow at the very principle of literary property. The King's Council conferred upon the descendants of La Fontaine the exclusive privilege of publishing their ancestor's works. That is to say, the Council took away without compensation from La Fontaine's publishers, a copyright for which they had paid in hard cash. The whole corporation

naturally rose in arms, and in due time the lieutenant of police was obliged to take the whole matter into serious consideration;—whether the maintenance of the guild of publishers was expedient; whether the royal privilege of publishing a book should be regarded as conferring a definite and unassailable right of property in the publication; whether the tacit permission to publish what it would have been thought unbecoming to authorise expressly by royal sanction, should not be granted liberally or even universally; and whether the old restriction of the booksellers to one quarter of the town ought to remain in force any longer. M. de Sartine invited Diderot to write him a memorandum on the subject, and was disappointed to find Diderot staunchly on the side of the booksellers (1767). He makes no secret, indeed, that for his own part he would like to see the whole apparatus of restraint abolished, but meanwhile he is strong for doing all that a system of regulation, as opposed to a system of freedom, can do to make the publication of books a source of prosperity to the bookseller, and of cheap acquisition to the bookbuyer. Above all things, Diderot is vehemently in favour of the recognition of literary property, and against such infringement of it as had been ventured upon in the case of La Fontaine. He had no reason to be especially friendly to booksellers, but for one thing, he saw that to nullify or tamper with copyright was in effect to prevent an author from having any commodity to sell, and so to do him the most serious injury possible. And for

another thing, Diderot had equity and common sense enough to see that no high-flown nonsense about the dignity of letters and the spiritual power could touch the fact that a book is a piece of marketable ware, and that the men who deal in such wares have as much claim to be protected in their contracts as those who deal in any other wares.[1]

There is a vivid illustration of this unexpected business-like quality in Diderot, in a conversation that he once had with D'Alembert. The dialogue is interesting to those who happen to be curious as to the characters of two famous men. It was in 1759, when D'Alembert was tired of the Encyclopædia, and was for making hard terms as the condition of his return to it. 'If,' said Diderot to him, 'six months ago, when we met to deliberate on the continuation of the work, you had then proposed these terms, the booksellers would have closed with them on the spot,

[1] Those who are interested in the history of authorship may care to know the end of the matter. Copyright is no modern practice, and the perpetual right of authors, or persons to whom they had ceded it, was recognised in France through the whole of the seventeenth century and three-quarters of the eighteenth. The perpetuity of the right had produced literary properties of considerable value; for example, Boudot's Dictionary was sold by his executors for 24,000 livres; Prévot's Manual Lexicon and two Dictionaries for 115,000 livres. But in 1777—ten years after Diderot's plea—the Council decreed that copyright was a privilege and an exercise of the royal grace. The motives for this reduction of an author's right from a transferable property to a terminable privilege seem to have been, first, the general mania of the time for drawing up the threads of national life into the hands of the administration, and second, the hope of making money by a tariff of permissions. The Constituent Assembly dealt with the subject with no intelligence nor care, but the Convention passed a law recognising in the author an exclusive right for his life, and giving a property for ten years after his death to heirs or *cessionaires*. The whole history is elaborately set forth in the collection of documents entitled *La Propriété littéraire au 18ième siècle.* (Hachette, 1859).

but now, when they have the strongest reasons to be out of humour with you, that is another thing.'

'And pray, what reasons?'

'Can you ask me?'

'Certainly.'

'Then I will tell you. You have a bargain with the booksellers; the terms are stipulated; you have nothing to ask beyond them. If you worked harder than you were bound to do, that was out of your interest in the book, out of friendship to me, out of respect for yourself; people do not pay in money for such motives as these. Still they sent you twenty louis a volume: that makes a hundred and forty louis that you had beyond what was due to you. You plan a journey to Wesel [in 1752, to meet Frederick of Prussia] at a time when you were wanted by them here; they do not detain you; on the contrary, you are short of money, and they supply you. You accept a couple of hundred louis; this debt you forget for two or three years. At the end of that rather long term you bethink you of paying. What do they do? They hand you back your note of hand torn up, with all the air of being very glad to have served you. Then after all you turn your back on an undertaking in which they have embarked their whole fortunes: an affair of a couple of millions is a trifle unworthy of the attention of a philosopher like you. . . . . But that is not all. You have a fancy for collecting together different pieces scattered through the Encyclopædia; nothing can be more opposed to their interests; they put this to you, you insist, the edition is produced, they advance the cost, you share the profits. It seemed that, after having thus twice paid you for their work, they had a right to look upon it as theirs. Yet you go in search of a bookseller in some quite different direction, and sell him in a mass what does not belong to you.'

'They gave me a thousand grounds for dissatisfaction.'

'*Quelle défaite!* There are no small things between friends. Everything weighs, because friendship is a commerce of purity and delicacy; but are the booksellers your friends? Then your be-

haviour to them is horrible. If not, then you have nothing to say against them. If the public were called upon to judge between you and them, my friend, you would be covered with shame.'

'What, can it be you, Diderot, who thus take the side of the booksellers?'

'My grievances against them do not prevent me from seeing their grievances against you. After all this show of pride, confess now that you are cutting a very sorry figure?'[1]

All this was the language of good sense, and there is no evidence that Diderot ever swerved from that fair and honourable attitude in his own dealings with the booksellers. Yet he was able to treat them with a sturdy spirit when they forgot themselves. Panckoucke, one of the great publishers of the time, came to him one day. 'He was swollen with the arrogance of a parvenu, and thinking apparently that he could use me like one of those poor devils who depend upon him for a crust of bread, he permitted himself to fly into a passion; but it did not succeed at all. I let him go on as he pleased; then I got up abruptly, I took him by the arm, and I said to him: "M. Panckoucke, in whatever place it may be, in the street, in church, in a bad house, and to whomsoever it may be, it is always right to keep a civil tongue in one's head. But that is all the more necessary still, when you speak to a man who has as little patience as I have, and that, too, in his own house. Go to the devil, you and your work. If you would give me twenty thousand louis, and I could do your

[1] Oct. 11, 1759; xviii. 401.

business for you in the twinkling of an eye, I would not stir. Be kind enough to go."'[1]

Before returning from the author to his books, it is interesting to know how he and his circle appeared at this period to some who did not belong to them. Gibbon, for instance, visited Paris in the spring of 1763. 'The moment,' he says, 'was happily chosen. At the close of a successful war the British name was respected on the continent; *clarum et venerabile nomen gentibus.* Our opinions, our fashions, even our games were adopted in France, a ray of national glory illuminated each individual, and every Englishman was supposed to be born a patriot and a philosopher.' He mentions D'Alembert and Diderot as those among the men of letters whom he saw, who 'held the foremost rank in merit, or at least in fame.'[2]

Horace Walpole was often in Paris, and often saw the philosophic circle, but it did not please his supercilious humour.

'There was no soul in Paris but philosophers, whom I wished in heaven, though they do not wish themselves so. They are so overbearing and underbred. . . . I sometimes go to Baron d'Holbach's, but I have left off his dinners, as there was no bearing the authors and philosophers and savants of which he has a pigeon-house full. They soon turned my head with a system of antediluvian deluges which they have invented to prove the eternity of matter. . . . In short, nonsense for nonsense, I liked the Jesuits better than the philosophers.'[3]

[1] xix. 319—20. [2] *Miscellaneous Works*, p. 73.

[3] Walpole to Selwyn. 1765. Jesse's *Selwyn* ii. 9. See also Walpole to Mann, iv. 283.

Hume, as everybody knows, found 'the men of letters really very agreeable; all of them men of the world, living in entire, or almost entire harmony, among themselves, and quite irreproachable in their morals.' He places Diderot among those whose person and conversation he liked best.

We have always heard much of the power of the Salon in the eighteenth century, and it was no doubt a remarkable proof of the incorporation of intellectual interests in manners that so many groups of men and women should have met habitually every week for the purpose of conversing about the new books and new plays, the fresh principles and fresh ideas, that were produced by the incessant vivacity of the time. The Salon of the eighteenth century passed through various phases; its character shifted with the intellectual mind of the day, but in all its phases it was an institution in which women occupied a place that they have never acquired in any society out of France. We are not here called upon to speculate as to the reasons for this; it is only worth remarking that Diderot was not commonly at his ease in the society of ladies, and that though he was a visitor at Madame Geoffrin's and at Mademoiselle Lespinasse's, yet he was not a constant attendant at any of the famous circles of which women had made themselves the centre. The reader of Madame d'Epinay's memoir is informed how hard she found it to tame Diderot into sociability. "What a pity," she exclaims, "that men of genius and of such eminent merit as

M. Diderot should thus wrap themselves up in their philosophy, and disdain the homage that people would eagerly pay them in any society that they would honour with their presence."[1]

One of the soundest social observers of the time was undoubtedly Duclos. His *Considerations on the Manners of the Century*, which was published in 1751, abounds in admirable criticism. He makes two remarks with which we may close our chapter. "The relaxation of morals does not prevent people from being very loud in praise of honour and virtue; those who have least of them know very well how much they are concerned in other people having them." Again, "The French," he said, "are the only people among whom it is possible for morals to be depraved, without either the heart being corrupted or their courage being weakened."

[1] D'Epinay, ii. 4; 138, 153, etc.

## *CHAPTER VII.*

### *THE STAGE.*

THERE is at first something incredible in the account given by some thinkers of Diderot, as the greatest genius of the eighteenth century; and perhaps an adjustment of such nice degrees of comparison among the high men of the world is at no time very profitable. What is intended by these thoroughgoing panegyrists is that Diderot placed himself at a point of view whence, more comprehensively than was possible from any other, he discerned the long course and the many bearings, the complex faces and the large ramifications, of the huge movement of his day. He seized the great transition at every point, and grasped all the threads that were to be inwoven into the pattern of the new time.

Diderot is in a thousand respects one of the most unsatisfactory of men and of writers. Yet it is hard to deny that to whatever quarter he turned, he caught the rising illumination and was shone upon by the spirit of the coming day. It was no copious and overflowing radiance, but they were the beams of the dawn. Hence, what he has to say, and we shall

soon see how much he said, about the two great arts of painting and the drama, though it is fragmentary, though it is insufficient, yet points, as all the rest of his thoughts pointed, along the lines that the best minds of the western world have since traversed. He would, in the old metaphysical language, have called the direction of it a turning to Nature, but if we translate this into more positive terms, just as we have said that the Encyclopædia was a glorification of pacific industry and of civil justice, so we may say that his whole theory of the drama was a glorification of private virtues and domestic life. And the definite rise of civil justice and industry over feudal privilege and a life of war, and again the elevation of domestic virtue into the place formerly held by patriotic devotion, are the two great sides of a single movement.[1] It is quite true that Diderot and the French of that day had only a glimpse of the promised land in art and poetry. The whole moral energy of the generation after Diderot was drawn inevitably into the strong current of social action. The freshly kindled torch of dramatic art passed for nearly half a century to the country of Lessing and Goethe.

There is in the use of a certain kind of abstract language this inconvenience, that the reader may suppose us to be imputing to Diderot a deliberate and systematic survey of the whole movement of his time, and a calculated resolution to further it, now in this way and now in that. It is not necessary to suppose

[1] See Comte's *Positive Polity*, vol. iii.

that the movement as a whole was always present to him. Diderot's mind was constantly feeling for explanations; it was never a passive recipient. The drama excited this alert interest just as everything else excited it. He thought about that as about everything else originally, that is to say, sincerely and in the spirit of reality.[1] Whoever turns with a clear eye and proper intellectual capacity in search of the real bearings of what he is about, is sure to find out the strong currents of the time, even though he may never consciously throw them into their most general and abstract expression.

Since Aristotle, said Lessing, no more philosophical mind than Diderot's has treated of the theatre. Lessing himself translated Diderot's two plays, and the Essay on Dramatic Poetry, and repeatedly said that without the impulse of Diderot's principles and illustrations his own taste would have taken a different direction. As a dramatist, the author of *Miss Sara Sampson*, of *Emilia Galotti*, and above all that noble dramatic poem, *Nathan the Wise*, could hardly have owed much to the author of such poor stuff as the Natural Son and the Father of the Family. Lessing had some dramatic fire, invention, spontaneous elevation; he had a certain measure, though not a very large one, of poetic impulse. Diderot had nothing of all these, but he had the eye of the philosophic critic. Anyone who reads Lessing's dramatic criticisms will

[1] "*That virtue of originality that men so strain after is not newness, as they vainly think (there is nothing new), it is only genuineness.*"—Ruskin.

see that he did not at all overrate his obligations to his French contemporary.[1] It has been replied to the absurd taunt about the French inventing nothing, that at least Descartes invented German philosophy. Still more true is it that Diderot invented German criticism.

Diderot's thoughts on the stage, besides his completed plays, and a number of fragmentary scenes, are contained principally in the Paradox on the Player, a short treatise on Dramatic Poetry, and three dialogues appended to the Natural Son. On the plays a very few words will suffice. The Natural Son must, by me at least, be pronounced one of the most vapid performances in dramatic history. Even Lessing, unwilling as he was to say a word against a writer who had taught him so much, is too good a critic not to recognise monotony in the characters, stiffness and affectation in the dialogue, and a pedantic ring in the sentences of new-fangled philosophy.[2] Even in the three critical dialogues that Diderot added to the play, Lessing cannot help discerning the mixture of superficiality with an almost pompous pretension. Rosenkranz, it is true, finds the play rich in fine sentences, in scenes full of effect, in which Diderot's moral enthusiasm expresses itself with impetuous eloquence. But even he admits that the hero's servant is not so far wrong when he cries, '*Il semble que le bon sens se soit enfui de cette maison,*'

[1] Lessing: 1729–81. Diderot: 1713—1784. As De Quincey puts it, Lessing may be said to have begun his career precisely in the middle of the last century.

[2] *Hamburg. Dramaturgie.* § 85. Werke, vi. 381. [Ed. 1873.]

and adds that the whole atmosphere of the piece is sickly with conscious virtue.[1] For ourselves we are ready for once even to sympathise with the hack-writer of the reactionary parties, Palissot, when he says that the Natural Son had neither invention, nor style, nor characters, nor any other single unit of a truly dramatic work. The reader who seeks to realise the nullity of the *genre sérieux* in Diderot's hands should turn from the Natural Son to Goldoni's play of The True Friend, from which Diderot borrowed the structure of his play, following it as narrowly as possible to the end of the third act. Seldom has transfusion turned a sparkling draught into anything so flat and vapid. In spite of the applause of the philosophic *claque*, led by Grimm,[2] posterity has ratified the coldness with which it was received by contemporaries. The Natural Son was written in 1757, but it was not until 1771 that the directors of the French Comedy could be induced to place it on the stage. The actors detested their task, and as we can very well believe, went sulkily through parts which they had not even taken the trouble to master.[3] The public felt as little interest in the piece as the actors had done, and after a single representation, the play was put aside. Ill-natured critics compared Diderot's play with Rousseau's opera; they insisted that the Natural Son and the Village Conjuror were a couple

[1] *Diderot's Leben*, i. 274, 277.

[2] *Corr. Lit.* ii. 103.

[3] See Grimm's account of the performance, *Corr. Lit.* vii. 313.

of monuments of the presumptuous incompetence of the encyclopædic cabal. The failure of the Natural Son as a drama came after it had enjoyed considerable success as a piece of literature, for it had been fourteen years in print. We can only suppose that this success was the fruit of an unflinching partisanship.

It is a curious illustration of the strength of the current passion for moral maxims, in season and out of season, that one scene which to the scoffers of that day seemed, as it cannot but seem to everybody to-day, a climax of absurdity and unbecomingness, was hailed by the party as most admirable, for no other reason than that it contained a number of high moralising saws. Constance, a young widow and a model of reason, takes upon herself to combat the resolution of Dorval not to marry, after he has led her to suppose that he has a passion for her, and after a marriage between them has been arranged. 'No,' he cries, 'a man of my character is not such a husband as befits Constance.' Constance begs him to reassure himself; tells him that he is mistaken; to enjoy tranquillity, a man must have the approval of his own heart, and perhaps that of other men, and he can have neither unless he remains at his post; it is only the wicked who can bear isolation; a tender soul cannot view the general system of sensible beings without a strong desire that they should be happy. Dorval, who cuts an extremely sorry figure in such a scene, exclaims, 'Ah, but children! Dorval would have children! When I think that we are thrown from

our very birth into a chaos of prejudices, extravagances, vices, and miseries, the idea makes me shudder!'—'Dorval, you are beset by phantoms, and no wonder. The history of life is so little known, while the appearance of evil in the universe is so glaring. . Dorval, your daughters will be modest and good; your sons noble and high-minded; all your children will be charming. . There is no fear that a cruel soul should ever grow in my bosom from stock of yours.'[1]

We can hardly wonder that players were disgusted, or critics moved to wicked jests. The counterpart to the scene in which Constance persuades Dorval that they would be very happy in one case, is the scene in which Dorval persuades Rosalie that they would be very unhappy in another case. The situations in themselves may command our approval morally, but they certainly do not attract our sympathies dramatically. That a woman should demonstrate to a man in fine sententious language the expediency of marrying her, is not inconsistent with good sense, but it is displeasing. When a man tells a woman that, 'though love draws in one way, duty draws in the other, we may admire his prudence, but we are glad when so delicate a business comes to an end. In the Natural Son the latter scene, though very long, is the less disagreeable of the two. And just as in Diderot's most wordy and tiresome pages we generally find some one phrase, some epithet, some

[1] Act iv. sc. 3.'

turn of a sentence whose freshness or strength or daring reveals a genius, so in this scene we find a few lines whose energy reminds us that we are not after all in the hands of some obscure playwright whose works ought long ago to have been eaten by moths or burnt by fire. Those lines are a warning against the temptation so familiar in every age since Paris was a guest in the halls of Menelaus, to take that fatal resolve, All for love and the world well lost. 'To do wrong,' says Dorval, 'is to condemn ourselves to live and to find our pleasure with wrongdoers; it is to pass an uncertain and troubled life in one long and never-ending lie; to have to praise with a blush the virtue that we flung behind us; to hear from the lips of others harsh words for our own action; to seek a little calm in sophistical systems that the breath of a single good man scatters to the winds; to shut ourselves for ever out from the spring of true joys, the only joys that are virtuous, austere, sublime; and to give ourselves up, simply as a way of escape from ourselves, to the weariness of those frivolous diversions in which the day flows away in self-oblivion, and our life glides slowly from us and loses itself in waste.'[1] A very old story, no doubt; but natural, true, and in its place.

What adds to the flatness of the play is a device which Diderot introduced on a deliberately adopted principle; we mean the elaborate setting out of the acting directions. Every movement, every gesture, every silent pause is written down, and we have the

[1] Act v. sc. 3.

impression less of a play, than of some strangely bald romance. In the versified declamation which then reigned on the French stage, nothing was left to natural action, nothing was told by change of position, by movement without speech, or in short by any means other than discourse. Diderot, repudiating the conventions of dramatic art, and consulting nature or reality, saw that there are many scenes in life in which it is more natural to the personages of the scene to move than to speak, in which indeed motion is natural, and speech is altogether unnatural. If this be so in real life, he said, it should be so on the stage, because nothing passes in the world which may not pass also in the theatre; and as pantomime, or expression of emotion, feeling, purpose, otherwise than by speech, has so much to do in life, the dramatist should make abundant use of pantomime in composing stage plays. Nor should he trust to the actor's invention and spontaneous sense of appropriateness. He ought to write down the pantomime whenever it adds energy or clearness to the dialogue; when it binds the parts of the dialogue together; when it consists in a delicate play that is not easily divined; and almost always he ought to write it down in the opening of a scene. If anyone is inclined to regard this as superfluous, let him try the experiment of composing a play, and then writing the pantomime, or 'business,' for it; he will soon see what follies he commits.[1]

Whatever we may think of the practice of writing

[1] *De la Poésie Dramatique*, ch. xxi.

the action as well as the words for the player, nobody would now dispute the wisdom of what Diderot says as to the part that pantomime fills in the highest kinds of dramatic representation. We must agree with his repeated laments over the indigence, for purposes of full and adequate expression, of every language that ever has existed or ever can exist.[1] 'My dear master,' he wrote to Voltaire on the occasion of a performance of *Tancred*, 'if you could have seen Clairon passing across the stage, her knees bending under her, her eyes closed, her arms falling stiff by her side as if they were dead; if you heard the cry that she uttered when she perceives Tancred, you would remain more convinced than ever that silence and pantomime have sometimes a pathos that all the resources of speech can never approach.'[2] If we wonder that he should have thought it worth while to lay so much emphasis on what seems so obvious, we have to remember that it did not seem at all obvious to people who were accustomed to the substitution of a mannered and symmetrical declamation for the energetic variety and manifold exuberance of passion and judgment in the daily lives of men.

We have already seen[3] that even when he wrote the Letter on the Deaf and Dumb, Diderot's mind was exercised about gesture as a supplement to discourse. In that Letter he had told a curious story of a bizarre experiment that he was in the habit of making at the

[1] vii. 107. [2] Nov. 28, 1760; xix. 457. [3] Above, p. 104.

theatre. He used to go to the highest seats in the house, thrust his fingers into his ears, and then, to the astonishment of his neighbours, watch the performance with the sharpest interest. As a constant playgoer, he knew the words of the plays by heart, and what he sought was to isolate the gesture of the performers, and to enjoy and criticize that by itself. He kept his ears tightly stopped, so long as the action and play went well with the words as he remembered them, and he only listened when some discord in gesture made him suppose that he had lost his place. The people around him were more and more amazed as they saw him, notwithstanding his stopped ears, shed copious tears in the pathetic passages. 'They could not refrain from hazarding questions, to which I answered coldly "that everybody had his own way of listening, and that my way was to stop my ears, so as to understand better"—laughing within myself at the talk to which my oddity gave rise, and still more so at the simplicity of some young people who also put their fingers into their ears to hear after my fashion, and were quite astonished that the plan did not succeed.'[1] This was an odd and whimsical way of acting on a conviction which lay deep in Diderot's mind, namely that language is a very poor, misleading and utterly inadequate instrument for representing what it professes, and what we stupidly suppose it, to represent. Rousseau had expressed the same kind of feeling when

[1] *Lettre sur les Sourds et les Muets*, i. 359.

he said that definitions might be good things if only we did not employ words in making them.

A curious circumstance is worth mentioning in connection with the Three Dialogues appended to the Natural Son. Diderot informs his readers that the incidents of the Natural Son had actually occurred in real life, and that he knew the personages. In the Dialogues it is assumed that the play had been written by the hero himself, and the hero is the chief speaker. Not a word is said from which the reader would guess that Diderot had borrowed the substance of his plot and some of its least insipid scenes from Goldoni. We can hardly wonder that he was charged with plagiarism. Yet it was not deliberate, we may be sure. When Diderot was strongly seized by an idea, outer circumstances were as if they did not exist. He was swept up into the clouds. 'Diderot is a good and worthy man,' wrote Madame Geoffrin to the King of Poland, 'but he has such a bad head, and he is so curiously organized that he neither sees nor hears what he does see and hear, as the thing really is; he is always like a man who is dreaming, and who thinks all that he has dreamed quite real.'[1]

The Father of the Family, written in 1758, and first acted in 1761, is very superior to the Natural Son; it even enjoyed a certain popularity. In Germany it became an established favourite, and in Italy it was only less popular than a piece of Goldoni's. The French were not quite so easy to please. In

[1] *Correspond. du Roi Stanislas-Auguste et de Mdme. Geoffrin*, p. 466.

1761 its reception was undoubtedly favourable, and it ran for more than a week. In 1769 it was reproduced, and, according to Diderot's own account, with enthusiasm. 'There was a frightful crowd,' he says, 'and people hardly remember such a success. I was surprised at it myself. My friends are at the height of exultation. My daughter came home intoxicated with wonder and delight.' Even Madame Diderot at length grew ashamed at having to confess that she had not seen her husband's triumph, and throwing aside her horror of the stage, was as deeply moved as everyone else.[1]

Notwithstanding this satisfactory degree of success, and though it was performed as late as 1835, the play never struck root in France. It is indeed a play without any real quality or distinction. Diderot, in his plays, said Madame de Stael, put the affectation of nature in the place of the affectation of convention.[2] The effect is still more disagreeable in the first kind of affectation than the second. The Father of the Family is made more endurable than the Natural Son by a certain rapidity and fire in the action, and a certain vigour in the characters of the impetuous son (Saint-Albin) and the malignant brother-in-law (the Commander). But the dialogue is poor, and the Father of the Family himself is as woolly and mawkish a figure as is usually made out of benevolent intentions and weak purpose combined. The woes of the

[1] Aug. 1769, xix. 314–23.

[2] Quoted in Mr. Sime's excellent *Life of Lessing* (Trübner & Co., 1877), p. 230.

heavy father of the stage, where there is no true pathos, but only a sentimental version of it, find us very callous. The language has none of that exquisite grace and flexibility which makes a good French comedy of our own day, a piece by Augier, Sandeau, Feuillet, Sardou, so delightful. Diderot was right in urging that there is no reason why a play should be in verse; but then the prose of a play ought to have a point, elegance, and highly wrought perfection, which shall fill us with a sense of art, though not the art of the poet. Diderot not only did not write comedy in such a style; but he does not even so much as show consciousness that any difference exists between one kind of prose and another. The blurred phrases and clipped sentences of what Diderot would have called Nature, that is to say of real life, are intolerable on the stage. Even he felt this, for his characters, though their dialogue is without wit or finish, are still dull and tame of speech in a different way from that in which the people whom we may meet are dull and tame. There is an art of a kind, though of an extremely vapid kind.

Again, though he may be right in contending that there is a serious kind of comedy as distinct from that gay comedy which is neighbour to farce—of this we shall see more presently—yet he is certainly wrong in believing that we can willingly endure five acts of serious comedy without a single relieving passage of humour. Contrast of character, where all the characters are realistic and common, is not enough. We

crave contrast in the dramatic point of view. We seek occasional change of key. That serious comedy should move a sympathetic tear is reasonable enough; but it is hard to find that it grudges us a single smile. The result of Diderot's method is that the spectator or the reader speedily feels that what he has before him substitutes for dramatic fulness and variety the flat monotony of a homily or a tract. It would be hard to show that there is no true comedy without laughter—Terence's Hecyra, for instance—but Diderot certainly overlooked, what Lessing and most other critics saw so clearly, that laughter rightly stirred is one of the most powerful agencies in directing the moral sympathies of the audience,—the very end that Diderot most anxiously sought.

It is mere waste of time to bestow serious criticism on Diderot's two plays, or on the various sketches, outlines, and fragments of scenes with which he amused his very slight dramatic faculty. If we wish to study the masterpieces of French comedy in the eighteenth century, we shall promptly shut up the volumes of Diderot, and turn to the ease and soft gracefulness of Marivaux's *Game of Love and Chance*, to the forcible and concentrated sententiousness of Piron's *Métromanie;* to the salt and racy flavour of Le Sage's *Turcaret.* Gresset, again, and Destouches wrote at least two comedies that were really fit for the stage, and may be read with pleasure to-day. Neither of these compliments can fairly be paid to the Natural Son and the Father of the Family. Dide-

rot's plays ought to be looked upon merely as sketchy illustrations of a favourite theory; as the rough drawings on a black board with which a professor of the fine arts may accompany a lecture on oil painting.

One radical part of Diderot's dramatic doctrine is wholly condemned by modern criticism; and it is the part which his plays were especially designed to enforce. 'It is always,' he says, 'virtue and virtuous people that a man ought to have in view when he writes. Oh, what good would men gain, if all the arts of imitation proposed one common object, and were one day to unite with the laws in making us love virtue and hate vice. It is for the philosopher to address himself to the poet, the painter, the musician, and to cry to them with all his might:—*O men of genius, to what end has heaven endowed you with gifts?* If they listen to him, speedily will the images of debauch cease to cover the walls of our palaces; our vices will cease to be the organs of crime; and taste and manners will gain. Can we believe that the action of two old blind people, man and wife, as they sought one another in their aged days, and with tears of tenderness clasped one another's hand and exchanged caresses on the brink of the grave, so to say—that this would not demand the same talent, and would not interest me far more than the spectacle of the violent pleasures with which their senses in all the first freshness of youth were once made drunk?'[1]

The emphasising moralists of Diderot's school never

[1] *De la Poésie Dramatique*, § ii. vii. 318.

understood that virtue may be made attractive, without pulling the reader or the spectator by the sleeve, and urgently shouting in his ear how attractive virtue is. When the *Heart of Midlothian* appeared (1818), a lady wrote about it as follows:—'Of late days, especially since it has been the fashion to write moral and even religious novels, one might almost say of the wise good heroines what a lively girl once said of her well-meaning aunt—"On my word she is enough to make anybody wicked." Had this very story been conducted by a common hand, Effie would have attracted all our concern and sympathy, Jeanie only cold approbation. Whereas Jeanie, without youth, beauty, genius, warm passions, or any other novel perfection, is here our object from beginning to end. This is "enlisting the affections in the cause of virtue" ten times more than ever Richardson did; for whose male and female pedants, all excelling as they are, I never could care half as much as I found myself inclined to do for Jeanie before I finished the first volume.'[1]

In other words, you must win us by kindling our sympathy, not by formally commanding our moral approval. To kindle sympathy your personage must be interesting; must touch our pity or wonder or energetic fellow-feeling or sense of moral loveliness, which is a very different thing from touching our mere sense of the distinctions between right and wrong. Direct homily excites no sympathy with the homilist,

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, iv. 177 (Ed. 1837).

Deep pensive meditations on the moral puzzles of the world are not at all like didactic discourse. But the Father of the Family was exactly fulfilling Diderot's notion of dramatic purpose and utility when he talked to his daughter in such a strain as this:—'Marriage, my daughter, is a vocation imposed by nature. . . He who counts on bliss without alloy knows neither the life of man nor the designs of heaven. If marriage exposes us to cruel pain, it is also the source of the sweetest pleasures. Where are the examples of pure and heart-felt interest, of real tenderness, of inmost confidence, of daily help, of griefs divided, of tears mingled, if they be not in marriage? What is there in the world that the good man prefers to his wife? What is there in the world that a father loves more dearly than his children? O sacred bond, if I think of thee, my whole soul is warmed and elevated!'[1]

But these virtuous ejaculations do not warm and elevate us. In such a case words count for nothing. It is actual presentation of beautiful character, not talk about it, that touches the spectator. It is the association of interesting action with character, that moves us and inspires such better moods as may be within our compass. Diderot, like many other people before and since, sought to make the stage the great moral teacher. That it may become so is possible. It will not be by imitating the methods of that colossal type of histrionic failure, the church-pulpit. Exhortation in set speeches always has been, and always will

[1] *Père de Famille*, act ii. sc. ii. p. 211.

be, the feeblest bulwark against the boiling floods of passion that helpless virtue ever invented, and it matters not at all whether the hortatory speeches are placed in the lips of Mr. Talkative, the son of Say-well, or of some tearful dummy labelled the Father of the Family.

Yet one is half ashamed to use hard words about Diderot. He was so modest about his work, so simple and unpretending, so wholly without restless and fretting ambitions, and so generous in his judgment of others. He made his own dramatic experiment, he thought little enough of it; and he was wholly above the hateful vice of sourly disparaging competitors, whether dead or living. He knew that he was himself no master, but he was manly enough to admire anybody who was nearer to mastery. He was full of unaffected delight at Sedaine's busy and pleasing little comedy, *The Philosopher without knowing it;* it was so simple without being stiff, so eloquent without the shadow of effort or rhetoric.[1] After seeing it, Diderot ran off to the author and embraced him, with many tears of joyful sympathy and gratitude. Sedaine, like Lillo, the author of Diderot's favourite play of *George Barnwell,* was a plain tradesman, and the success of his libretti for comic operas had not spoiled him. He could find no more expansive words for his excited admirer than '*Ah, monsieur Diderot, que vous êtes beau!*'[2] Diderot was just as sensible of the originality and Aristophanic gaiety of Collé's brilliant play,

[1] xix. 474. [2] *Paradoxe sur le Comédien,* p. 383.

*Truth in Wine*, though Collé detested the philosophic school from Voltaire downwards, and left behind him a bitterly contemptuous account of the Natural Son.[1]

Of all comic writers, however, the author of the Andria and the Heautontimorumenos was Diderot's favourite. The half-dozen pages upon Terence, which he threw off while the printer's boy waited in the passage (1762), are one of the most easy, flowing and delightful of his fragments; there is such appreciation of Terence's suavity and tact, of his just and fine judgment, of his discrimination and character. He admits that Terence had no verve; for that he commends the young poet to Molière or Aristophanes, but as verve was exactly the quality most wanting to Diderot himself, he easily forgave its absence in Terence, and thought it amply replaced by his moderation, his truth, and his fine taste. Colman is praised for translating Terence, for here, says Diderot, is the lesson of which Colman's countrymen stand most in need. The English comic writers have more verve than taste. 'Vanbrugh, Wycherley, Congreve, and some others have painted vices and foibles with vigour; it is not either invention or warmth or gaiety or force that is wanting to their pencil, but rather that unity in the drawing, that precision in the stroke, that truth in colouring, which distinguish portrait from caricature. Especially are they wanting in the art of discerning and seizing those naïf, simple, and yet singular movements of character which always

[1] *Journals*, ii. 331. Also vi. 248; vii. 9.

please and astonish, and render the imitation at once true and piquant.'[1] Criticism has really nothing to add to these few lines, and if Diderot in his last years read the *School for Scandal* or the *Rivals*, he would have found no reason to alter his judgment.

One English play had the honour of being translated by Diderot; this was the *Gamester*, not the *Gamester* of Shirley nor of Garrick, but of Edward Moore (1753). It is a good example of the bourgeois tragedy or domestic drama which Diderot was so eager to see introduced on to the French stage. The infatuation of Beverley, the tears and virtue of Mrs. Beverley, the prudence of Charlotte and the sage devotion of her lover, the sympathetic remorse of Bates and even the desperation of Stukely, made up a picture of domestic misery and moral sentiment with which Diderot was sure to fall in love. Lillo's *George Barnwell*, with its direct and urgent moral, was a still greater favourite, and Diderot compared the scene between Maria and Barnwell in prison to the despair of the Philoctetes of Sophocles, as the hero is heard shrieking at the mouth of his cavern;[2] just as a more modern critic has thought Lillo's other play, *The Fatal Curiosity*, worthy of comparison with the Œdipus Tyrannus.

Diderot's feeling for Shakespeare seems to have been what we might have anticipated from the whole cast

[1] *Réflexions sur Térence*, v. 223—238. In another place (*De la Poésie Dram.* 370) he says:—'Nous avons des comédies. Les Anglais n'ont que des satires, à la vérité pleines de force et de gaieté, mais sans mœurs et sans goût. Les Italiens en sont réduits au drame burlesque.'

[2] vii. 95.

of his temperament. One of the scenes which delighted him most was that moment of awe when Lady Macbeth silently advances down the stage with her eyes closed, and imitates the action of washing her hands, as wondering that 'the old man should have so much blood in him.' 'I know nothing,' he exclaims, 'so pathetic in discourse as that woman's silence and the movement of her hands. What an image of remorse!'[1]

It was not to be expected that Diderot should indulge in those undiscriminating superlatives about Shakespeare which are common in Shakespeare's country. But he knew enough about him to feel that he was dealing with a giant. 'I will not compare Shakespeare,' he said, 'to the Belvedere Apollo, nor to the Gladiator, nor to Antinous'—he had compared Terence to the Medicean Venus—'but to the Saint Christopher of Notre Dame, an unshapely colossus, rudely carven, but between whose legs we could all pass without our brows touching him.'[2] Not very satisfactory recognition perhaps; but the Saint Christopher is better than Voltaire's drunken savage.

It is not every dramatist who treats the art of acting as seriously as the art of composition. The great author of *Wilhelm Meister* is the most remarkable exception to this rule, and Lessing is only second to him. It is hardly possible for a man to be a great

[1] *Lettre sur les Sourds et les Muets*, i. 355.

[2] *Paradoxe*, viii. 384. The criticism on the detestable rendering of *Hamlet* by Ducis (viii. 471) makes one doubt whether Diderot knew much about Shakespeare.

dramatist, and it is simply impossible for a man to be a great critic of the drama, who has not seriously studied the rules, aims, and conditions of stage representation. Hazlitt, for instance, has written some admirable pages about the poetry, the imaginative conception, the language, of Shakespeare's plays, but we find his limit when he says that King Lear is so noble a play that he cannot bear to see it acted. As if a play could be fully judged without reference to the conditions of the very object with which it was written. A play is to be criticized as a play, not merely as a poem. The whole structure of a piece depends on the fact that it is to be acted; its striking moments must be great dramatic, not merely beautiful poetic, moments. They must have the intensity of pitch by which the effect of action exceeds the effect of narrative. This intensity is made almost infinitely variable with the variations in the actor's mastery of his art.

Diderot, who threw so penetrating a glance into every subject that he touched, even if it were no more than a glance, has left a number of excellent remarks on histrionics. The key to them all is his everlasting watchword: *Watch nature, follow her simple and spontaneous leading.* The Paradox on the Player is one of the very few of Diderot's pieces of which we can say that, besides containing vigorous thought, it has real finish in point of literary form. There is not the flat tone, the heavy stroke, the loose shamble, that give a certain stamp of commonness to so many of

his most elaborate discussions. In the Paradox the thoughts seem to fall with rapidity and precision into their right places; they are direct; they are not overloaded with qualifications; their clear delivery is not choked by a throng of asides and casual ejaculations. Usually Diderot writes as if he were loth to let the sentence go, and to allow the paragraph to come to an end. Here he lays down his proposition, and without rambling passes on to the next. The effort is not kept up quite to the close, for the last half-dozen pages have the ordinary clumsy mannerism of their author.

What is the Paradox? That a player of the first rank must have much judgment, self-possession, and penetration, *but no sensibility.* An actor with nothing but sense and judgment is apt to be cold; but an actor with nothing but verve and sensibility is crazy. It is a certain temperament of good sense and warmth combined, that makes the sublime player.[1] Why should he differ from the poet, the painter, the orator, the musician? It is not in the fury of the first impulse that characteristic strokes occur to any of these men; it is in moments when they are tranquil and cool, and such strokes come by an unexpected inspiration.[2] It is for coolness to temper the delirium of enthusiasm. It is not the violent man who is beside himself, that disposes

[1] Letter to Mdlle. Jodin, xix. 387.

[2] Johnson one day said to John Kemble: 'Are you, sir, one of those enthusiasts who believe yourself transformed into the very character you represent?' Kemble answered that he had never felt so strong a persuasion himself. —*Boswell*, ch. 77.

of us; that is an advantage reserved for the man who possesses himself. The great poets, the great actors, and perhaps generally all the great imitators of nature, whatever they may be, are gifted with a fine imagination, a great judgment, a subtle tact, a sure taste, but they are creatures of the smallest sensibility. They are equally well fitted for too many things; they are too busy in looking, in recognising, and in imitating, to be violently affected within themselves. Sensibility is hardly the quality of a great genius. He will have justice; but he will practise it without reaping all the sweetness of it. It is not his heart but his head that does it all. Well, then, what I insist upon, says Diderot, is that it is extreme sensibility that makes mediocre actors; it is mediocre sensibility that makes bad actors; and it is the absolute want of sensibility that prepares actors who shall be sublime.[1]

This is worked out with great clearness and decision, and some of the illustrations to which he resorts to lighten the dialogue are amusing enough. Perhaps the most interesting to us English is his account of Garrick, whose acquaintance he made towards the year 1765. He says he saw Garrick pass his head between two folding doors, and in the space of a few seconds, his face went successively from mad joy to moderate joy, from that to tranquillity, from tranquillity to surprise, from surprise to astonishment,

[1] Lessing makes this a starting point of his criticism of the art of acting, though he uses it less absolutely than Diderot would do. *Hamburg. Dramaturgie*, § 3, vol. vi. 19.

from astonishment to gloom, from gloom to utter dejection, from dejection to fear, from fear to horror, from horror to despair, and then reascend from this lowest degree to the point whence he had started.[1] Of course his soul felt none of these emotions. 'If you asked this famous man, who by himself was as well worth a journey to England to see, as all the wonders of Rome are worth a journey to Italy, if you asked him, I say, for the scene of the Little Baker's Boy, he played it; if you asked him the next minute for the scene from Hamlet, he played that too for you, equally ready to sob over the fall of his pies, and to follow the path of the dagger in the air.'[2]

Apart from the central proposition, Diderot makes a number of excellent observations which show his critical faculty at its best. As, for example, in answering the question, what is the truth of the stage? Is it to show

[1] In Lichtenberg's *Briefe aus England* (1776) there is a criticism of the most admirably intelligent kind on Garrick. Lord Lytton gave an account of it to English readers in the *Fortnightly Review* (February, 1871). The following passage confirms what Diderot says above :—

'You have doubtless heard much of his extraordinary power of change of face. Here is one example of it. When he played the part of Sir John Brute, I was close to the stage, and could observe him narrowly. He entered with the corners of his mouth so turned down as to give to his whole countenance the expression of habitual sottishness and debauchery. And this artificial form of the mouth he retained, unaltered, from the beginning to the end of the play, with the exception only that, as the play went on, the lips gaped and hung more and more in proportion to the gradually increasing drunkenness of the character represented. This made-up face was not produced by stage paint, but solely by muscular contraction; and it must be so identified by Garrick with his idea of Sir John Brute as to be spontaneously assumed by him whenever he plays that part; otherwise, his retention of such a mask, without even once dropping it either from fatigue or surprise, even in the most boisterous action of his part, would be quite inexplicable.'

[2] viii. 382.

things exactly as they are in nature? By no means. The true in that sense would only be the common. The really true is the conformity of action, speech, countenance, voice, movement, gesture, with an ideal model imagined by the poet, and often exaggerated by the player. And the marvel is that this model influences not only the tone, but the whole carriage and gait. Again, what is the aim of multiplied rehearsals? To establish a balance among the different talents of the actors. The supreme excellence of one actor does not recompense you for the mediocrity of the others, which is brought by that very superiority into disagreeable prominence. Again, accent is easier to imitate than movement, but movements are what strike us most violently. Hence a law to which there is no exception, namely, under pain of being cold, to make your dénouement an action and not a narrative.[1]

One of the strongest satires on the reigning dramatic style Diderot found in the need that the actor had of the mirror. The fewer gestures, he said, the better; frequent gesticulation impairs energy and destroys nobleness. It is the countenance, the eyes, it is the whole body that ought to move, and not the arms.[2] There is no maxim more forgotten by poets than that which says that great passions are mute. It depends on the player to produce a greater

[1] viii. 373, 376, &c.

[2] As Hamlet to his players:—'Now do not saw the air too much with your hand thus; but use all gently: for in the very torrent, tempest, and (as I may say) the whirlwind of passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness.'

effect by silence, than the poet can produce by all his fine speeches.[1] Above all, the player is to study tranquil scenes, for it is these that are the most truly difficult. He commends a young actress to play every morning, by way of orisons, the scene of Athalie with Joas; to say for evensong some scenes of Agrippina with Nero; and for Benedicite the first scene of Phædra with her confidante. Especially there is to be little emphasis,—a warning grievously needed by ninety-nine English speakers out of a hundred,—for emphasis is hardly ever natural; it is only a forced imitation of nature.[2]

Diderot had perceived very early that the complacency with which his countrymen regarded the national theatre was extravagant. He would not allow a comparison between the conventional classic of the French stage and the works of the Greek stage. He insisted in the case of the Greeks that their subjects are noble, well chosen, and interesting; that the action seems to develope itself spontaneously; that their dialogue is simple and very close to what is natural; that the dénouements are not forced; that the interest is not divided nor the action overloaded with episodes. In the French classic he found none of these merits. He found none of that truth which is the only secret of pleasing and touching us; none

[1] To Jodin, xix. 382. 'Point de hoquets, point de cris, de la dignité vraie, un jeu ferme, sensé, raisonné, juste, mâle; la plus grande sobriété de gestes. C'est de la contenance, c'est du maintien, qu'il faut déclamer les trois quarts du temps.'—p. 390.

[2] p. 395.

of that simple and natural movement which is the only path to perfect and unbroken illusion. The dialogue is all emphasis, wit, glitter; all a thousand leagues away from nature. Instead of artificially giving to their characters *esprit* at every point, poets ought to place them in such situations as will give it to them. Where in the world did men and women ever speak as we declaim? Why should princes and kings walk differently from any man who walks well? Did they then gesticulate like raving madmen? Do princesses when they speak utter sharp hissings? People believe us to have brought tragedy to a high degree of perfection. It is not so. Of all kinds of literature it is the most imperfect.[1]

The ideas which appeared thus incongruously in the tales of 1748, reappeared in the direct essays on the drama in 1757 and 1758. We have left nothing undone, he said, to corrupt dramatic style. We have preserved from the ancients that emphasis of versification which was so well fitted to languages of strong quantity and marked accent, to vast theatres, to a declamation that had an instrumental accompaniment; and then we have given up simplicity of plot and dialogue, and all truth of situation.[2] La Motte nearly fifty years before had attacked the pseudo-classic drama. He had inveighed against the unities, against long monologues, against the device of confi-

[1] *Bijoux Indiscrets*, ch. xxxviii.

[2] vii. 121. Lessing makes a powerful addition to this. *Hamburg. Dram.* vi. 261.

dants, and against verse. His assault, in which he had the powerful aid of Fontenelle, was part of that battle between Moderns and Ancients with which the literary activity of the century had opened. The brilliant success of the tragedies of Voltaire had restored the lustre of the conventional drama, though Voltaire infused an element of the romantic under the severity of the old forms. But the drama had become even less like Sophocles and Euripides in *Zaïre* than in *Phédre* or *Iphigénie*. Voltaire intended to constitute the French drama into an independent form. He expected to be told that he was not like Sophocles, and he did not abstain from some singularly free railing against Euripides. The Greek pieces often smacked too much of the tone of the fair to satisfy him; they were too familiar and colloquial for a taste that had been made fastidious by the court-pieces of Lewis the Fourteenth. Diderot was kept free from such deplorable criticism as this, by feeling that the Greek drama was true to the sentiment of the age that gave it birth, and that the French drama, if not in the hands of Racine, still even in the hands of Voltaire, and much more in the hands of such men as Lagrange-Chancel and the elder Crébillon, was true to no sentiment save one purely literary, artificial, and barren. He insists on the hopelessness of the stage, unless men prepare themselves at every part for a grand return to nature. We have seen what is his counsel to the actor. He preaches in the same key to the scene-painter and the maker of costumes. Scene-painting ought to be more rigorously

true than any other kind of picture. Let there be no distraction, no extraneous suggestion, to interfere with the impression intended by the poet. Have you a salon to represent? Let it be that of a man of taste and no more: no ostentation and no gilding, unless the situation expressly demands the contrary.

In the dresses the same rule holds good. Under robes that are overladen with gold lace, I only see a rich man; what I want to see is a man. Pretty and simple draperies of severe tints are what we need, not a mass of tinsel and embroidery. 'A courageous actress has just got rid of her panier, and nobody has found her any the worse for it. Ah, if she only dared one day to show herself on the stage with all the nobility and simplicity of adjustment that her characters demand; nay, in the disorder into which she would be thrown by an event so terrible as the death of a husband, the loss of a son, and the other catastrophes of the tragic stage, what would become, round her dishevelled figure, of all those powdered, curled, frizzled, tricked-out creatures? Sooner or later they must put themselves in unison. O nature, nature! We cannot resist her.'[1]

From all this we turn, for a few moments only, and not too cheerfully, to the Serbonian bog of dramatic rules and the metaphysics of the theatre. There is no subject in literature, not even the interpretation of the Apocalypse, which has given birth to such

[1] *Poésie Dramatique*, §§ 20 & 21.

pedantic, dismal, and futile discussion. The immense controversy, carried on in books, pamphlets, sheets and flying articles, mostly German, as to what it was that Aristotle really meant by the famous words in the sixth chapter of the *Poetics*, about tragedy accomplishing the purification of our moods of pity and sympathetic fear, is one of the disgraces of human intelligence, a grotesque monument of sterility. The great tap-root of fallacy has been and remains the incessant imputation of ethical or social purpose to the dramatist, and the demand of direct and combined ethical or social effect from the drama. There is no critic from the great Aristotle downwards who has steered quite clear of these evil shallows; Diderot, as we have seen, least of all. But Diderot disarms the impatience which narrower critics kindle, by this magnificent concession, coming at the close of all:—'Especially remember that *there is no general principle;* I do not know a single one of those that I have indicated, which a man of genius cannot infringe with success.'[1] Here we listen to the voice of the genuine Diderot; and if this be granted, we need not give more than a passing attention to the rules that have gone before,—about the danger of borrowing in the same composition the shades both of the comic and of the tragic styles; about movement being injurious to dignity, and of the importance therefore of not making the principal personage the *machinist*

[1] 3ième *Entretien*, vii. 138.

of the piece; about the inexpediency of episodic personages,—and so forth. The only remark worth making on these propositions is that, whatever their value may be, Diderot at any rate, like a true philosopher, generalised from the facts of nature and art. He did not follow the too common critical method of reading one's own ideas into a work of art, and then taking them back again in the more imposing form of inevitable deductions from the work itself.

What Diderot conceived himself really to have done was to have sketched and constituted a new species in the great dramatic kingdom. Every one knows, he said, that there is tragedy and that there is comedy, but we have to learn that there is room in nature and the art of the stage for a third division, namely, the *genre sérieux*, a kind of comedy that has for its object virtue and the duties of man. Why should the writer of comedy confine his work to what is vicious or ridiculous in men? Why should not the duties of men furnish the dramatist with as ample material as their vices? Surely in the *genre honnête et sérieux* the subject is as important as in gay comedy. The characters are as varied and as original. The passions are all the more energetic as the interest will be greater. The style will be graver, loftier, more forcible, more susceptible of what we call sentiment, a quality without which no style ever yet spoke to the heart. The ridiculous will not be absent, for the madness of actions and speeches, when they are suggested by the misunderstanding of interests or by

the transport of passion, is the truly ridiculous thing in men and in life.[1]

Besides his own two pieces, Diderot would probably have pointed to Terence as the author coming nearest to the *genre sérieux*. If Goethe's bad play of *Stella* had retained the close as he originally wrote it, with the bigamous Fernando in the last scene rejoicing over the devoted agreement of the two ladies and his daughter to live with him in happy unity, that would perhaps have been a comedy of the *genre sérieux*, with the duties of man gracefully adapted to circumstances.

The theory of the *genre sérieux* has not led to the formation of any school of writers adopting it and working it out, or to the production of any masterpiece that has held its ground, as has happened in tragedy, comedy, and farce. Beaumarchais, who at last achieved such a dazzling and portentous success by one dramatic masterpiece, began his career as a playwright by following the vein of the Father of the Family; but the *Marriage of Figaro*, though not without strong traces of Diderotian sentiment in pungent application, yet is in its structure and composition less French than Spanish. It is quite true, as Rosenkranz says, that the prevailing taste on the French stage in our own times favours above all else bourgeois romantic comedy, written in prose.[2] But the strength

[1] *Poés. Dram.* § 2. The Poetics of the Genre Sérieux are to be found, vii. 137–8.

[2] i. 316.

of the romantic element in them would have been as little satisfactory to Diderot's love of realistic moralising, as the conventional tragedy of the court of Lewis XIV. The Fable of most of them turns on adultery, and this is not within the method of the *genre sérieux* as expounded by Diderot. Perhaps half-a-dozen comedies, such for instance as *The Ideas of Madame Aubray*, by M. Dumas, are of the *genre sérieux*, but certainly there are not enough of such comedies to constitute a genuine Diderotian school in France. There is no need therefore to say more about the theory than this, namely, that though the drama is an imitative art, yet besides imitation its effects demand illusion. What, cries Diderot, you do not conceive the effect that would be produced on you by a real scene, with real dresses, with speech in true proportion to the action, with the actions themselves simple, with the very dangers that have made you tremble for your parents, for your friends, for yourselves? No, we answer: reproduction of reality does not move us as a powerful work of imagination moves us. 'We may as well urge,' said Burke, 'that stones, sand, clay, and metals lie in a certain manner in the earth, as a reason for building with these materials and in that manner, as for writing according to the accidental disposition of characters in Nature.'[1] Common dangers do not excite us; it is the presentation of danger in some uncommon form, in some new combination, in some fresh play of motive and passion,

[1] *Hints for an Essay on the Drama*, p. 155.

that quickens that sympathetic fear and pity which it is the end of a play to produce. And if this be so, there is another thing to be said. If we are to be deliberately steeped in the atmosphere of Duty, illusion is out of place. The constant presence of that severe and overpowering figure, 'Stern Daughter of the Voice of God,' checks the native wildness of imagination, restricts the exuberance of fancy, and sets a rigorous limit to invention. Diderot used to admit that the *genre sérieux* could never take its right place, until it had been handled by a man of high dramatic genius. The cause why this condition has never come to pass, is simply that its whole structure and its regulations repel the faculties of dramatic genius.

Besides the perfection of the *genre sérieux*, Diderot insisted that the following tasks were also to be achieved before the stage could be said to have attained the full glory of the other arts. First, a domestic or bourgeois tragedy must be created. Second, the conditions of men, their callings and situations, the types of classes, in short, must be substituted for mere individual characters. Third, a real tragedy must be introduced upon the lyric theatre. Finally, the dance must be brought within the forms of a true poem.

The only remark to be made upon this scheme touches the second article of it. To urge the substitution of types of classes for individual character was the very surest means that could have been devised for bringing back the conventional forms of the

pseudo-classic drama. The very mark of that drama was that it introduced types instead of vigorously stamped personalities. What would be gained by driving the typical king off the stage, only to make room for the generalisation of a shopkeeper? This was not the path that led to romanticism, to André Chenier, to De Vigny, to Lamartine, to Victor Hugo. Théophile Gautier has told us that the fiery chiefs of the romantic school who suddenly conquered France at the close of the Restoration, divided the whole world into *flamboyant* and *drab*. In the literature of the past, they counted Voltaire one of the Drab, and Diderot a Flamboyant.[1] If it be not too presumptuous in a foreigner to dissent, we cannot but think that they were mistaken. Nothing could be further removed at every part from Diderot's dramatic scheme than *Faust* or *Gotz von Berlichingen* or *Hernani*.

The truth is that it was impossible for an effective antagonism to the classic school to rise in the mind of an Encyclopædist, for the reason that the Encyclopædists hated and ignored what they called the Dark Ages. Yet it was exactly the Dark Ages from which the great Romantic revival drew its very life-breath. 'In the eighteenth century,' it has been said, 'it was really the reminiscence of the classic spirit which was awakened in the newer life of Europe, and made prominent.'[2] This is true in a certain historic sense

[1] *Hist. du Romantisme*, p. 93.

[2] *Der Gegensatz des Classischen und des Romantischen, etc.* By Conrad Hermann, p. 66.]

of Rousseau's politics, and perhaps of Voltaire's rationalism. In spite of the vein of mysticism which occasionally shows in him, it is true in some degree of Diderot himself, if by classicism we mean the tendency to make man the centre of the universe. Classicism treats man as worthy and great, living his life among cold and neutral forces. This is the very opposite of the sinfulness, imperfection and nothingness habitually imputed to man, and the hourly presence of a whole hierarchy of busy supernatural agents placed about man by the Middle Ages. Yet we cannot but see that Diderot was feeling for dramatic forms and subjects that would have been as little classic as romantic. He failed in the search. There is one play and only one of his epoch, that is not classic and is not romantic, but speaks independently the truest and best mind of the eighteenth century itself, in its own form and language. That play is *Nathan the Wise*.

END OF VOL. I.

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